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YVOR WINTERS AND MODERN POETRY:
TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF "POST-SYMBOLIST IMAGERY"

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

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Courons à l'onde en rejaillir vivant!
--Valéry

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled YVOR WINTERS AND MODERN POETRY: TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF "POST-SYMBOLIST IMAGERY"

submitted by Gordon Charles Harvey

in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts.

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TO C. Q. DRUMMOND

Abstract

Late in his critical career Yvor Winters formulated the notion of "post-Symbolist imagery." He suggested that the imagery of certain modern poets combines romantic sensory impressiveness and the conceptualizing intelligence of the Renaissance, that in these writers "the language is often sensory and conceptual at the same time." This thesis attempts to understand some of the implications of this idea.

In the short poem of the Renaissance sensory detail is typically subordinated to thought in one of several describeable ways; but post-Romantic poems tend to emphasize sensory and emotional consciousness to the exclusion of rational consciousness. Imagism and Mallarmean Symbolism, although they display something of the surface manner of thought-controlled poetry, are attenuated forms of this exclusiveness; there is in fact more scope and genuine complexity in the work of such a "primitive" as Thomas Hardy.

Post-Symbolist imagery is not sensory detail carrying meaning in a new way, but rather uses the traditional vehicles of concrete/abstract simultaneity, symbol and figure. These, however, are raised in sensory evocativeness to the level of imagery, and their conceptual significance is not stated explicitly. Application of Winters' notion to several passages of modern poetry shows it to be a useful, if not wholly unproblematic, critical tool for getting at just what is modern in such poems, and at the sense in which that modernity can be positive. Finally, an examination of the romantic theme of communion with nature in poems by Vaughan, Keats, Leconte de Lisle, and Winters himself suggests the importance of the notion to cross-historical study.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTORY

> We are so constituted that even our perceptions are dependent upon our experience with language and can be communicated only in language. It is in language that we live the life of human beings; our language is the great reservoir of communal knowledge and perception, which has been accumulating for thousands of years, on which we draw in proportion as we have the will and the talent: it is in the fullest command of language that we live most fully.

That style and being are interdependent is the fundamental premise of responsible literary criticism. Amid the varieties of aestheticism, relativism, and pseudo-science that pass for criticism today, the work of Yvor Winters is distinguished by its insistence on this premise and its implications. The passage above is from Winters' last work, Forms of Discovery (1967, pp. 244-5), but as early as 1929 he was writing of technique as "not merely a means of recording perception but . . . actually a means to discovery, a projection, a refinement, an intensification of the spirit, created by the spirit to make its boundaries more precisely, to extend them a little farther."[1] By both formulations, the flexibility of a poet's style determines the extent to which he realizes human potential. Winters came to see with increasing clarity that the most fully human style was that which could accomodate as simultaneously as possible intense sensory perception and rigorous thought, without diminishing either. In 1959 he wrote of the limitations of the Renaissance lyric:

> But the plain style sacrifices a part of our experience, the sensory, and the ornate style does not really recover it in a satisfactory way. We are, of course, rational animals, and most of our thinking is done in abstractions, and this was going on even before Plato; and we have become familiar with abstractions and with their relationship to daily experience --they can be used with emotional force as well as intellectual. But we are also sensory animals, and we live in a physical universe and if we are blind to the impressiveness and meanings of our physical surroundings, we are limited. It ought to be possible to embody our sensory experience in poetry in a efficient way not as ornament, and with no sacrifice of rational intelligence. [2]

This possibility was realized, Winters believed, in the work of certain post-Romantic poets, where "in the best lines sense-perception and concept are simultaneous; there is neither ornament nor explanation, and neither is needed" (Forms, 270). This idea warrants more attention, I believe, than Winters, who formulated it late in his life and had other matters to deal with, could give it. It is the primary subject of this thesis.

In the 1959 essay, "Poetic Styles Old and New," Winters speaks of the "total method" of these writers as "post-Symbolist," that method involving both this "new kind of imagery" and, as a structural principle, the controlled "association" of ideas (as opposed to logical or at least rational progression from point to point). In Forms too we read of "the post-Symbolist procedure in both its aspects" (287); but the book most often reserves the term for the new kind of imagery: "In some of the poems I shall discuss we have the controlled association in conjuction with post-Symbolist imagery; in some we have post-Symbolist imagery with the rational structure of the Renaissance" (253). This is the use of the term that is my first concern, although the matter of structure will be seen to be finally inseparable from that of imagery.

It is customary to begin by discussing critical background, but in Winters' case there is little to discuss. His prose is extremely compact; he writes with a clarity and finality that makes difficult matters seem obvious, and this, perhaps more that his radical views, has made him unpopular with scholars --a worrying number of whom seem committed to making the obvious seem difficult. The term "post-Symbolist," of course, was in use before 1959; it appears, for instance, in discussions by and of Pound and Eliot. But it is commonly used to denote only an historical period, not a method. W. K. Wimsatt's use of the term in 1949 is typical:

> We may see metaphysical and neo-classical poetry as near the extreme of logic (though by no means reduced to that status) and romantic poetry as a step toward directness of sensory presentation (though by no means sunk into subrationality). As a structure which favours implication rather than overt statement, the romantic is far closer than the metaphysical to symbolist poetry and the varieties of postsymbolist most in vogue today. Both types of structure, the metaphysical and the romantic, are valid.[3]

Wimsatt implies an important connection between structure and imagery, but he clearly does not regard "postsymbolist" as an integration of the two methods he discusses, rather as a period of time: he refers in another essay to "the postsymbolist world of letters."[4] And although men since the empiricist philosophers advocated thinking in "images,"[5] so far as I have been able to determine, Winters' particular formulation of the notion, for all its apparent simplicity, is also original.

Edmund Wilson comes close in Axel's Castle:

> There are no real ideas, no general reflections, in such a poem as "Le Cimetière Marin": Valéry presents, even more completely than Yeats in such a poem as "Among Schoolchildren," the emotion merged with the idea and both embedded in the scene where they have occurred . . . . World and poet are always interpenetrating, as they might in a Romantic poem; but the Symbolist will not even try, as the

> Romantic would be likely to, to keep their relations consistent; the conventions of the poem's imagery change as quickly and as naturally as the images passing through the poet's mind.[6]

Wilson, however, does not develop further the ideas of intellectual-perceptual fusion and associational structure. Also, he thinks of these new methods as "Symbolist," whereas post-Symbolism, in Winters' view, is significantly different from the French practice and that of the English imitators.

This thesis has no chapter of conclusions. It does not attempt to be a definitive account of post-Symbolist imagery, but a first exploration, raising perhaps as many questions as it settles. The essays that follow therefore approach Winters' idea from different angles. I first discuss aspects of the theory and uses of sensory detail in poets that precede the post-Symbolists (although they are only in a limited sense precursors): the French Symbolists, as represented by Mallarmé, and the Imagists. I then take up generally Winters' idea as it is variously offered in his later work. In the final essay I turn to analyses of individual poems; the principle of selection is a central Romantic theme that has a particular bearing on style, a theme most impressively dealt with by Winters himself. In the remainder of this introductory essay I will attempt some simple definitions and distinctions by considering in an abstract way, as Winters does not,[7] what imagery is and what it does in poems.

1.

The very name of the Renaissance "ornate" style suggests part of the reason it could not recover in a satisfactory way what was sacrificed by the generalized "plain" style; a later remark of Winters' on post-Symbolism is more explicit: "the imagery is not ornament, as it would be in the Renaissance" (Forms, 259). The sweeping criticism of Renaissance methods implied here seems to fly in the face of a good deal of modern thinking, especially about the metaphysical poets, who are said to be distinguished by the very functionality of their imagery.[8] Nor does Winters himself explicitly justify the remark in his own detailed and extensive writing on Renaissance poetry. To say what force the remark can have, it is necessary to distinguish three terms that are sometimes confused.

Winters speaks often of "sensory detail." He simply means by it concrete diction, words that refer to impressions of the world we apprehend through our senses, the world of colors, forms, tastes, scents, sounds, textures, temperature and other bodily states. Sensory detail in poems may be names of conrete particulars: "honey," "river," "bark"; or it may be other parts of speech normally or originally used to describe particulars: "sticky," "meander," rough." When such as these latter do appear without reference to concrete particulars, they are being used figuratively: "a sticky situation," "the argument meanders," "a rough time."

"Imagery" is, to borrow a phrase from Winters, "living detail." J. V. Cunningham has given us a succinct definition of the image: "a descriptive phrase that invites the reader to project a sensory

construction."[9] Thus, though there will be cases where the designation is arguable, it is safe to say that sensory detail, which comprises a good deal of our ordinary speech, is not usually imagery, which requires a much greater that ordinary command of language. "The trees" is sensory detail; "junipers shagged with ice/ The spruces rough in the distant glitter/ Of the January sun" is imagery. Sensory detail in poems may or may not aspire to the evocative condition of imagery, and it may or may not achieve the condition when it does aspire.[10] A point Winters makes several times about Renaissance detail is that it does not often aspire: "the flowers and bees [in Vaughan's "To His Books"] are employed in a manner common to the Renaissance; that is, we are not expected to visualize them or feel any great interest in them as flowers and bees, but rather we are expected to understand their relationship to the total theme of the poem as mere concepts" (Forms, 102). A point he makes several times about Romantic verse is that it aspires but does not often achieve: "we are supposed to be moved by the mere mention of rural details," he says of Dyer, and in only slightly different ways, of Milton, Whitman, and Wordsworth. This is an especially potent indictment when there is little other aspiration than vividness, little interest in the details' "relationship to the total theme of the poem." This song by John Attey, though full of detail, is devoid of imagery:

> Vain Hope, adieu! thou life-consuming moth,
> Which frets my soul in pieces with delay:
> My well-spun threads will make no cloth
> To shroud me from the tempest of decay;
> For storms of fortune drench me like a flood,
> Whilst rancor's frost nips merit in her bud.[11]

But there is a clear and important meaning to which the details are subordinated. On the other hand, the many details of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" --"gardens bright with sensuous rills," "many an incense bearing tree," "forests ancient as the hills," "sunny spots of greenery," "that deep romantic chasm," and so on-- Winters points out, "are equally empty of descriptive and intellectual content" (Forms, 174).

In a "figure of speech" one thing is spoken of in terms ordinarily thought appropriate to another, especially, where sensory detail is concerned, by way of simile and metaphor (of which personification is a variety). These by definition involve the interaction of two elements, and imply a meaningful statement about the relationship; they are a different sort of linguistic element, a more complex one, than sensory detail or imagery. Two well-known books on the "image" seem to me to mislead in their idiosyncratic use of the term: Rosemond Tuve's Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery claims to demonstrate the impossible, that images in themselves function logically; Frank Kermode's Romantic Image reports the obvious, that images can be without paraphraseable content. Both books are really considering something more complex than the image, something much closer, especially in Tuve's case, to the figure of speech.[12] Figurative speech usually involves sensory detail, as in "he's a bleeding heart," or the Attey poem, or Cunningham:

> ...The surf breaking,
> Repetitive and varied as love
> Enacted.[13]

But it need not; Cunningham again:

> The antiquity of grace, where yet
> We live in terror and delight
> With love as quiet as regret
> And love like anger in the night.

And figures, particularly extended ones, can involve imagery. Donne's statement in Holy Sonnet 10, "Death, thou shalt die," does not; but Taylor's address to Christ in "Meditation 112" does:

> My death lies buried
> Within thy Grave, my Lord, deep under ground,
> It is unshinned, as Carrion rotten Dead.
> * * * *
> With empty Eyeholes, Butter teeth, bones bare
> And spraggling arms, having an Hour Glass
> In one grim paw . . . .[14]

This is nowise to say that the Taylor poem is superior; it is in fact not, for reasons that have not especially to do with sensory vividness.

To think of figures as "functional" or "ornamental" is to consider whether vehicle opens up tenor, or merely decorates it. To call a figure ornamental is to call whatever sensory detail is involved ornamental. But so few Renaissance figures are imagistic that to generalize about ornamental imagery in the Renaissance is to take on only a small part of the range of figures. The short poem of the Renaissance rarely focusses on particulars in and for themselves; it normally attemps to persuade by rational argument, and brilliant detail can distract both poet and reader from the point. (One might look at post-Symbolism as a resolution of this problem.) Even when a degree of particularity is important to the poem's purpose, the taste for artifice and the limited stock of descriptive phrases and patterns from which the Renaissance poet has to choose usually work against the imagistic. On occasion we do find figures like Taylor's that are finely perceived or in some way force themselves upon the senses. The point of Winters' remark is that in such cases the perception is not really important to the poem; the vividness may be wasted or sometimes even disruptive. He writes of Donne's "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning":

> There is much reference to sensory --usually to visual-- detail in Renaissance poetry which is not meant to be visualized. But the gold and the compasses are meant to be visualized, or, if they are not meant so, Donne out-did himself. Yet we do not visualize the lovers either as gold or as compasses: if we did so, the poem would become preposterous. We visualize the gold and the compasses, and between these and the lovers there is a very general, and almost uncertain intellectual correspondence. It is the gold and the compasses which save these passages, and very nearly in their own right. The passages are ornament, or very nearly so. (Forms, 73)

2.

One of the things assumed in Winters' criticism is that styles can at least partly be defined by the way such vividness as _is_ offered by their detail _functions_. Figurative speech, for instance, can be a way of using sensory detail or imagery; and there are other ways[15] that vary in complexity depending on the general intention to which a poem's detail (although prior in our original act of comprehension), in retrospect, can be seen to be subordinated. It will be helpful to think of three general intentions a poem can have with respect to sensory detail, though these are obviously not mutually exclusive. We may find purely descriptive detail, existing in and for itself in the way that a photograph or a super-realist painting might; we may find detail existing for what it suggests, for its emotional or other resonances, in the way an Impressionist or abstract painting of the same subject might; or we may find detail working in a conceptual context to define or enforce an idea, in the way an illustration for a text (an etching by

Blake, for instance) might, but which the plastic arts by themselves can but crudely do. The first two intentions represent such a narrow use of language (however complex the means of achieving the narrowness) that pure instances are rare. The third is the essence of poetry, although the movement, gradually since Milton in England, and rapidly since Baudelaire in France, has been towards one or both of the first two. This has made for more "immediate" but less generalized, and so very often less interesting poems. I will elaborate upon these three intentions.

One can find passages of pure description often enough in long narrative works as setting or plot, but the conventions of the short poem will (or would for several centuries) rarely permit a great deal of uncharged detail. In the short narrative poem setting may be symbolic or it may call forth abstract commentary, action may be illustrative of a general point, and both may imply something about a character; but in these cases detail is no longer functioning primarily in and for itself. Narrative aside, one sometimes finds passages in the "scientific poetry" of sixteenth century France interested in what things look, feel, or sound like; but there is nothing in the sixteenth century to compare to Thomson's The Seasons for unsubordinated description, or to the Parnassians' tableaux of objects fixed for art's sake; and there is nothing in Thomson or the Parnassians to compare with:

As the cat
climbed over
the top of

the jamcloset
first the right
forefoot

carefully
then the hind
stepped down

into the pit of
the empty
flowerpot.[16]

Williams marshalls the resources of syntax, rhythm, stanza, and even type (no upper-case) to secure from his detail the effect of ordinary, non-transcendent sense-perception. Few Imagist poems are as ordinary (nor, as I shall later argue, did they aim to be), although some come close to being as purely interested to convey sensory information. These are by the young Yvor Winters:

Spring Rain
My doorframe smells of leaves.[17]

Cool Nights
At night, bare feet on flowers.

Still Morning
Snow air, my fingers curl.

Vacant Lot
Tough hair like dead
grass over new and
hooves quick and
impatient the he-goat
looks round him
over frozen mud
but
finds no mate
hardeyed
and savage he
turns back and nips
the bitter grass.

A more sophisticated example is in Eliot's "Preludes":

The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in passageways.
Six o'clock.
The burnt out ends of smoky days.
And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers beat
On broken blinds and chimney-pots
And at the corner of the street

A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.

And the lighting of the lamps.[18]

These last two passages are clearly working not merely the strictly referential aspect of sensory detail, but the emotionally suggestive, as well. The descriptive intention dominates, but there is some sentiment involved. In poems of the second intention --primarily the recreation of a mood-- the sentiment dominates,[19] and we have truly "lyric" poems. Of this kind are the simplest love complaints and seasonal celebrations of the Middles Ages and Renaissance. In Surrey's sonnet, these two forms are combined:

> The soote season, that bud and blome furth bringes,
> With grene hath clad the hill and eke the vale;
> The nightingale with fethers new she sings;
> The turtle to her make hath tolde her tale.
> Somer is come, for every spray now springes'
> The hart hath hong his olde hed on the pale;
> The buck in brake his winter cote he flinges;
> The fishes flote with newe repaired scale;
> The adder all her sloughe awaye she slings;
> The swift swalow pursueth the flyes smale;
> The busy bee her honye now she minges;
> Winter is worne that was the flowers bale.
> And thus I see among these pleasant thinges
> Eche care decayes, and yet my sorrow springes.[20]

The three quatrains of detail work to create the single feeling of new and growing happiness --"among these pleasant things,/ Each care decays"-- for the sole purpose of contrast, simple and undeveloped, with the speaker's sorrow (as in so many Petrarchan poems, there is marked disproportion of subject matter and real theme). There is little thought in the poem, and what descriptive force the details have (beyond the effect of "everywhere but here") is subordinate to their combined emotional effect. At least, however, the motive for the emotion attributed to nature is traditionally appropriate, and the motive for the speaker's emotion, if undeveloped, is implicit in the Petrarchan

convention. In the Romantics and after, the emotion becomes more private and plausible motivation less an evident concern as poets come to be thought of (and to think of themselves) as innately prophetic and profound, as being deep even when they are simply dreaming or grumbling. Baudelaire's sonnet "Spleen" (#1, the most clearly motivated of the "Spleen" poems) is like Surrey's sonnet a poem of thwarted love, and the fact is likewise not revealed until the final line. The poem has been taken so much more seriously than Surrey's partly, no doubt, because the detail is urban, but mainly because the emotion arising from it is more mysterious:

> Pluviôse, irrité contre la ville entière,
> De son urne à grands flots verse un froid ténébreux
> Aux pâles habitants du voisin cimetière
> Et la mortalité sur les faubourgs brumeux.
>
> Mon chat sur le carreau cherchant une litière
> Agite sans repos son corps maigre et galeux;
> L'âme d'un vieux poëte erre dans la gouttière
> Avec la triste voix d'un fantôme frileux,
>
> Le bourdon se lamente, et la bûche enfumée
> Accompagne en fausset la pendule enrhumée,
> Cependant qu'en un jeu plein de sales parfums,
>
> Héritage fatal d'une vieille hydroptique,
> Le beau valet de coeur et la dame de pique
> Causent sinistrement de leurs amours défunts.[21]

The details here, to invoke a popular but somewhat tautological notion only usefully applicable to this sort of poetry, are the "objective correlative" of the emotion, the "formula" for its evocation. But emotion is not a good in itself, we want to hear more about its cause.[22] Verlaine is another whose talent for emotional suggestion sometimes (more often than in Baudelaire) overwhelms his intelligence:

> La lune blanche
> Luit dans les bois;
> De chaque branche
> Part une voix
> Sous la ramée....

O bien-aimée

L'étang reflète,
Profond miroir,
La silhouette
De saule noir
Où le vent pleure....
Rêvons, c'est l'heure.

Un vaste et tendre
Apaisement
Semble descendre
Du firmament
Que l'astre irise....
C'est l'heure exquise.[23]

We have in these poems what Winters calls (in Collins) "the associational use of visual details . . . supposed to convey emotion without other aid" (Forms, 154).[24] Verlaine is perfectly aware of the absence of motive in his work; he tells us elsewhere that it pains him more than anything else:

Il pleure dans mon coeur
Come il pleut sur la ville,
* * * *
Il pleure sans raison,
* * * *
C'est bien la pire peine
De ne savoir pourquoi,
Sans amour et sans haine,
Mon coeur a tant de peine!

But feeling without reason ("De la musique avant toute chose") is the very basis of this style. The passage really does not so much call the pain into question as pay tribute to its intensity. Debussy recognized this, and set the piece to music.

The third intention is to use sensory detail in a conceptual context to define or enforce a relatively complex thought, complex, that is, relative to that implied in William's poem ("There is a cat") or Surrey's ("Nature seems happy; I'm not") or Verlaine's ("The moon is out and I feel dreamy"). This does not involve an attempt to strip sensory

detail of its tactile and emotional qualities; detail is often desirable for the very fact that it can be made to suggest the unscientific and undefineable in life. But these properties are limited by the intellectual context. The main kinds of context can, I think, be listed. Two are fundamental to rational discourse itself and thus to the expository poem: first, sensory detail can be offered in answer to a question posed or in support of a claim made. "Come live with me and be my love," coos Marlowe's passionate shepherd, "And we will all the pleasures prove"; and then we get a list of those pleasures. From Voltaire's "Le Mondain":

> Regrettera qui veut le bon vieux temps . . .
> Moi, je rends grâce à la nature sage
> Qui, pour mon bien, m'a fait naître en cet âge
> Tout décrié par nos tristes fondeurs.
> * * * *
> Mon cher Adam, mon gourmand, mon bon père,
> Que faisais-tu dans les jardins d'Eden?
> Travaillais-tu pour ce sot genre humain?
> Caressais-tu madame Eve, ma mère?
> Avouez-moi que vous avez tous deux
> Les ongles longs, un peu noirs et crasseux,
> La chevelure assez mal ordonnée,
> Le teint bruni, la peau bise et tannée.
> Sans propreté, l'amour le plus heureux
> N'est plus amour, c'est un besoin honteux.
> Bientôt lassis de leur belle aventure,
> Dessous un chêne ils soupent galamment
> Avec de l'eau, du millet et du gland;
> Le repas fait, ils dorment sur la dure:
> Voila l'état de la nature pure.[25]

And second, the development can be the reverse: sensory detail may comprise a particular scene, emotional state, or event, that calls forth commentary, as in Ronsard's "Mignonne, allons voir si la rose," Leconte de Lisle's "Midi," or Tuckerman:

> Dank fens of cedar, hemlock-branches gray
> With trees and trail of mosses wringing wet,
> Beds of the black pitch-pine in dead leaves set
> Whose wasted red has wasted to white away,
> Remnants of rain and droppings of decay.

Why hold ye so my heart, nor dimly let
Through your deep leaves the light of yesterday,
The faded glimmer of a sunshine set?
Is it that in your blindness, shut from strife,
The bread of tears becomes the bread of life?
Far from the roar of day, beneath your boughs
Fresh griefs beat tranquilly, and loves and vows
Grow green in your gray shadows, dearer far
Even than all the lovely lights and roses are?[26]
[1st series VII]

Or Winters' "On the Portrait of a Scholar of the Italian Renaissance":

The color, quick in fluid oil,
Affirms the flesh and lambent hair;
And darkness, in its fine recoil,
Confesses that the mind is there.

With heavy lip, with massive curls,
With Wisdom weighted, strong and dense,
The flesh is luminous as pearls;
The eyes ingenuous but intense.

The face is noble; but the name
Is one that we shall scarcely hold.
This is a vision in a frame,
Defined and matted down with gold.

Our names, with his, are but the lees
Residual from this clear intent;
Our finely grained identities
Are but this golden sediment.

As in Marlowe and Voltaire, in both these poems the sensory detail has full tactile and emotional force. Tuckerman's poem, despite the presence of commentary, is hardly an advance of consciousness on Verlaine; Winters' poem shows that Renaissance methods can make for a considerable advance on Surrey.

Third, sensory detail may be working, as it does very often in prose fiction --and as things themselves do, in life-- to imply by its very presence something about a character, as in Browning's dramatic monologues, or in Eliot's ("My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin"), or in this unusual and brilliant syllabic by Elizabeth Daryush, "Still Life":

> Through the open French window the warm sun
> lights up the polished breakfast-table, laid
> around a bowl of crimson roses, for one--
> a service of Worcester porcelain, arrayed
> near it a melon, peaches, figs, small hot
> rolls in a napkin, fairy rack of toast,
> butter in ice, high silver coffee-pot,
> and, heaped on a salver, the morning's post.
>
> She comes over the lawn, the young heiress,
> from her early walk in her garden-wood,
> feeling that life's a table set to bless
> her delicate desires with all that's good,
>
> that even the unopened future lies
> like a love-letter, full of sweet surprise.[27]

Although this use of detail is common in modern poetry of mainly emotional intention, where the thing to be implied about a character is simply that he (usually the speaker) is in a particular mood, it is rare where there is intellectual rigour. Another kind of context working by unexplained presentation is a staple tool of the ironist: one sort of detail may, by its tone or associations, deflate the pretensions of another sort with which it is juxtaposed. The classical extended example of this in English is Gulliver's Travels, especially the first two parts. The method is strikingly common in the heyday of Pound-Eliot modernism; derived from Laforgue, for instance, it is an important part of The Waste Land, where it works to dramatize the idea that the past (represented by literary allusion) is no longer alive for us:

> Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song.
> The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
> Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
> Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.
> And their friends, the loitering heirs of City directors;
> Departed, have left no addresses.
> * * * * *
> But at my back from time to time I hear
> The sound of horns and motors.

The last two contexts I shall mention are the most important for the present study. The detail may be symbolic of something. It may be

a traditional or somehow "public" symbol, as, for instance, are certain colors in religious contexts, some mythological figures (eg. Proteus in The Odyssey), and some allegorical ones (Good Deeds, the Slough of Despond); it may be a "private" symbol, a poet's own short-hand for an idea, which often, as in Blake, Nerval, and Yeats, depends on our knowing more of the poet than is in the poem; or it may be a "contextual" symbol, a detail or group of details that take on a conceptual value as the poem develops: the greenness of the Green Knight, the settings in Crabbe's "Peter Grimes," and Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner." And finally, detail may be part of an illuminating comparison, analogy, or figure of speech;[28] either local ("bright shoots of everlastingness") or extended, where the context of thought of the whole poem is developed through a figure, as in Vaughan's "The Lamp" or J. V. Cunningham's epigram:

> I had gone broke, and got set to come back,
> And lost, on a hot day and a fast track,
> On a long shot at long odds, a black mare
> By Hatred out of Envy by Despair.

Any number of these contexts may be working to control sensory detail in a given poem, although it is normally possible to say which apply locally, and which dominate, in the sense of bearing most importantly on the poem's structure. It is also possible, however, to find the forms of these traditional contexts, especially symbol and figure, in poems that are not thought-controlled but rather of primarily descriptive or emotional intention, and this leads me to my first subject, the use of sensory detail in the Symbolists and Imagists.

CHAPTER II BACKGROUNDS: ASPECTS OF SYMBOLIST AND IMAGIST IMAGERY

> Est-ce que le chemin de l'omnipotence, de l'omniscience qu'ambitionne le mage, ou celui du néant, par la perte de toute conscience? Etats opposés mais complémentaires.
>
> --Marcel Raymond
> De Baudelaire au surréalisme

Winters is probably best known for his characterization of modern poetry as fundamentally romantic. The modern "eccentrics," he writes near the end of his last book, "are all motivated by the same ideas about poetry which destroyed the poetry of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: they are nominalists, relativists, associationists, sentimentalists, and denigrators of the rational mind" (Forms, 323). Winters is not the only critic to have seen through the modernist anti-romantic pose, but his analysis is one of the most detailed and profound. That analysis was made possible, as Grosvenor Powell has noted, by Winters' finding roots in a philosophical position that afforded him distance from the biases of his time. In brief, he saw being and consciousness as equivalents, and accepted Aquinas' notion that being is good, lack thereof, evil. Romanticism was an attempt to exaggerate the emotional and sensory sides of consciousness by suppressing the rational side; it made for incomplete being in poets, poems, and readers, and was therefore evil.[1] Mallarmé, Eliot, Pound, and others, Winters discovered, are not only continuators but intensifiers of Romanticism.

Winters' analysis does not lead him to a distinction between the qualities of being isolated by Romantic procedures, emotion and sensation, but in the context of our attempt to understand the criticism, such a distinction will be useful. It might be approached historically: the background of Romanticism is the two-century-long attack on Aristotileanism and in general on the assumption that everything men need to know is already available in classical writings, that "discovery" is a matter of analyzing and arranging (according to established principles) what is already known. When the traditional categories of rhetoric and thought came to be seen as arbitrary and fell into disrepute, men were obliged to look where they could for authority: outward to nature and inward to their own memories and feelings.[2] Empiricism and "natural morality" (the two doctrines suggested by Winters as the sources of romantic practice) are quests for outward and inward authority, respectively. One can see them as foundations for a poetry of primarily descriptive intention, on one hand, and primarily emotional intention, on the other. These intentions, of course, be not really constitute distinct categories: the relationship between them is complex beyond our present scope; but the fact remains that Imagism and Symbolism, insofar as their practice lives up to their slogans (which themselves register exclusion: "no ideas but in things"; "rien que la nuance") can instructively be seen to represent two extremes of the romantic deprivation of being that is the background to post-Symbolism. In this essay I will consider some of the theory and techniques of that deprivation.

1.

I am aware of the reasons against taking up the matter of Symbolism in a short space. The term is used to describe writers as diverse as Blake and Proust, and even the French movement itself is not quite the "school" of stable membership and fixed principles we are sometimes led to believe. The poetry is self-consciously obscure; the scholarship on the subject is immense, and often as bewildering as the poetry, when it attempts to organize and justify the curious, cultish Symbolist ideas.[3] And there is the problem of the "prose poem." I will confine myself primarily to observations on the theory and style of the single most important Symbolist, Mallarmé. I will begin, however, by considering Winters' general account of Symbolism.

Although he regards as romantic, in the way I have suggested, most of the poetry since the eighteenth century, Winters does recognize some difference (if not a major distinction) between the practice of the Romantics proper and that of their heirs. Symbolist detail is sharper:

> The Romantic poets, both English and French, were interested in sensory perception, natural detail, but the interest was for the greater part theoretic; they talk about sensory details, they refer to them, but in stereotyped language . . . My three Frenchmen see them, hear them, feel them and sometimes even smell them, and with a clarity and intensity which is often startling. (Forms, 251)

And Symbolist poems are more purely expressive of emotion. Winters writes of the Symbolist extension of a romantic idea:

> If it is the business of the poem to "express" emotion, then the form itself of expression should be expressive, and if we are rigourously reasonable, as a few romantics are, in pursuit of their unreasonable ends, we shall see that language can best be purely expressive of emotion if it is so used so that all except emotional content is as nearly as possible eliminated. (IDR, 435)

Mallarmé, he writes, is a "pure" romantic, since his concept of purity or ideal emptiness is a concept of

> pure connotation, pure suggestion, or . . . pure emotion. This filling of emptiness with suggestion or sensation, may seem odd until we recall that in the romantic tradition reason and concept are the source of all evil, and sensation and emotion or suggestion in itself, pure of understanding, empty of meaning, is an absolute good. (Forms, 242)

This view of Symbolism has the virtue of simplicity, but the simplicity may be misleading in two important respects. We must be wary, in the first place, of the casualness of the conjunctions "suggestion or sensation" and "sensation and emotion or suggestion." It is true that sensory detail can generate emotion, but intense particularity and suggestiveness are not easily and certainly not always combined. If the detail is genuinely vivid, as with Williams' cat, the concreteness, the "thereness," of the scene will tend to work against nuance and resonance, by definition "not-there." When detail is subordinated to an intellectual context, the problem need not be acute; but by the middle of the nineteenth century, rational control, even in French verse, was decaying. Thus whether the poem should imitate the concreteness and fixed outline of the statue or aspire to the non-representational, purely suggestive condition of music became a real issue in French poetics. The first view, as expressed in Gautier's "L'Art," is normally associated with the Parnassians, the latter, as expressed in Verlaine's "Art Poétique," with the Symbolists. We ought not, therefore, unquestioningly accept Winters' account of Symbolist sensory sharpness.

In the second place, even if we detach "sensation" from the list, the conflation of "connotation" and "suggestion" with "emotion" remains

problematic. Winters and other critics sometimes use "connotation" to mean the emotional element on poetry, as opposed to "denotation," the rational element. Better terms for their purpose would be "tone" and "argument," or "feeling" and "statement": "connotation," like "suggestion," has a more general reference.[4] Traditionally, the word has referred to all the attributes, implications, and associations of a thing; emotional connotation is but one of many possible kinds. A connotation of "tree" in a given context might be "joy," but also perhaps "green" or "summer" or "growth" or "life." We will want to ask of Winters whether the Symbolists seek to isolate emotion in their poems, or connotation.

But the question is not even this simple, and here the focus of my discussion must shift from Winters to Mallarmé. In the case of French Symbolism, the term "emotion" itself presents difficulties. When I spoke, in my introductory chapter, of a poetry of primarily "emotional" intention, I had in mind ordinary human feelings: love, sorrow, bitterness, pity, terror, joy, anger, desire. A good many Symbolist poems, to be sure, are mood pieces, attempts to subordinate all elements in the poem to one such feeling or another; I have cited instances by Baudelaire and Verlaine. There was a tendency in French poetics after Gautier and Poe, however, to regard such emotions as crude. Real poetry was seen increasingly as something artificial and remote from ordinary life: the emotion proper to it was the "aesthetic emotion," the emotion arising from the disinterested preception of artistic organization, of complex and harmonious relations; in short, of Beauty. In his early introduction to the Fry-Mauron edition of Mallarmé, Roger Fry writes:

> Almost all works of art are more or less impure; that is to say, they allow or even excite in the contemplator echoes of the emotions which are aroused by actual life, such as pity, fear, desire, curiosity. So that our reaction to such works is (at all events for a time) compounded with those purely detached emotions which are peculiar to esthetic apprehension.[5]

The autotelic notion of purity implied here is the chief link between Poe, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry; it is a common theme in the poetry of the latter two. Not only must poetry be distinguished from thought ("vide d'idées," so as to avoid what Poe call "the heresy of The Didactic"), but

> il nous importe d'opposer aussi nettement que possible l'émotion poétique à l'émotion ordinaire; l'état . . . poétique me semble consister dans une perception naissante, dans une tendance à percevoir un <u>monde</u> ou système complet de rapports . . . dans une relation indéfinissable, mais merveilleusement juste.[6]

Now the aesthetic emotion may finally <u>be</u> indefineable, but Valéry's remark (suggesting as it does an analogy with mystical intuition[7]) and indeed, as we shall see, the practice of pure poetry, suggest that for these writers it is something resembling serene wonder or simply mystery. Mallarmé regrets that "on veut à la Musique, limiter le Mystère; quand l'écrit y prendre."[8] His complaint against the Parnassians is that, by concentrating on sensory definition, they are deficient in mystery.[9] Here, in Mallarmé's persistent concern with mystery, we have an important connection between the use of sensory detail and the ideal of aesthetic purity, an ideal of which Winters takes no account.[10] Mallarmé's view is quite simply that poems should not describe at all, but evoke: "l'horreur de la forêt, ou le tonnerre muet épars au feuillage; non le bois intrinsèque et dense des arbres."[11] At first, Mallarmé's attitude was simply that of the aesthete, repelled by the vulgar imperfection of the physical world, but it quickly became

metaphysical, as well. "Je dis: une fleur!" runs the celebrated remark, "et, hors de l'oubli ou ma voix relègue aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d'autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève, idée même et suave, l'absente de tous bouquets."[12] Poetry must abandon the messy world of particularity and attempt to evoke --by suggesting a presence (or rather, an absence), but of no particular thing-- a realm of incorruptible essences. "A quoi bon le merveille de transposer un fait de nature en sa presque disparition vibratoire selon le jeu de la parole, cependant, si ce n'est pour qu'en émane, sans la gêne d'un proche ou concret rappel, la notion pure."[13]

But Mallarmé is only very superficially in the tradition of Plato. In one way, he is much closer to modern "ordinary language philosophy." He was led, by an intense self-consciousness about his medium, to anticipate Wittgenstein's discovery that "the limits of my language are the limits of my world." At the same time, he represents the culmination of the older tradition of post-Cartesian skepticism. Descartes' injuction to distrust our own perceptions led eventually to Kant's notion that in fact we can never know reality at all, but only appearances --reality screened, arranged, and colored by our perceptual equipment. Like many other writers of the nineteenth centruy, Mallarmé was much taken by this side of Idealist thought, the notion of a veil of appearances covering reality. But his skepticism is more complete in an important respect: our very language is a part of this veil,[14] we cannot even say what we really feel about that which we cannot know. However, Mallarmé believed (or desperately tried to), the Poet might transcend the human limitation of language and not only see through the veil to the Absolute beyond, but help his readers to imagine the

experience. He would, of course, require a medium quite different from ordinary language, a medium pure of reference to things as we know them: "j'invente une langue," he wrote to Henri Cazalis, "qui doit nécessairement jaillir d'une poétique très nouvelle, que pourrais définir en ces deux mots: Peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit."[15]

2.

One cannot but admire Mallarmé's devotion to the cause of poetry as an art, but it would be foolish to take very seriously the ideas of a man who would give up in his art both the natural world of things and the human world of feelings, ideas, and moral distinctions. The ideas are quite unrealizable in poetic practice, for the poet's medium cannot but be ordinary language, which has its roots in the very confrontation of the human with the natural world and is nothing apart from that confrontation. Yet Mallarmé's verse sometimes comes surprisingly close to evoking a realm outside this context, a realm clearly not of this world, yet seeming somehow to partake of the real. The method appears to be a species of illusion: the poems manage to create the impression of profound and definite significance with remarkably little intellectual justification for the impression; and they seem to have a sensory texture, but scrutiny reveals no perception of the world, no concreteness. I would like to address myself briefly to the second of these characteristics.

The source of the illusion of sensuousness is the simple fact that the poems are studded with sensory detail; the reasons for the therefore curious absence of realization are several. Unlike most of his contemporaries who wrote fiction, Mallarmé had little interest in becoming a keen observer; indeed, the world of shifting sensory particulars seems to have made him rather queasy.[16] Partly as a result of this, the stylized diction to which aesthetes seem prone is exaggerated in his writing. One can readily form a comprehensive list of details: mirrors, empty rooms, fountains, foam, various metals and stones, roses and lilies, fans, women's hair, snow and ice, delicate ornaments and pieces of furniture, the colors blue, white, gold, and occasionally purple. Mallarmé was certainly aware of the artificiality and frigidity of most of these things;[17] he was doubtless also aware that their recurrence would work against real-world vividness.

The details I have listed will be recognized as somewhat Parnassian in their solidity, but the Parnassians brought to their poems the fruits of their historical imaginations and research --not only a variety of details-- but clear descriptive contexts. This raises an important point. Mallarmé is a densely metaphorical and sometimes symbolical writer, not ever a directly descriptive one. But sensory vividness in language of any sort entails at least a momentary co-operation of sensory details in the construction of a definite impression, and this entails a certain stability of perspective; we need to know, if only for a moment, just what sort of experience we are dealing with. But Mallarmé will not let us know; he will not give us a chance to locate ourselves in the world, to focus. The poetry is consistently unstable in perspective; it changes subject, and shifts in and out of metaphor

and from one metaphor to another, without transitional connectives. The sentences are periphrastic and digressively parenthetical, often separating objects and modifiers from their subjets or placing them before their subjects. The result is that the details are scattered, rather than concentrated, jumbled with diction of various kinds and connotations.[18] Moreover, Mallarmé's details, when they do come together, tend to be modified in unnatural or even unreal ways ("la blancheur sanglotante des lys," "ouvrir ma bouche à l'astre efficace des vins," "un arôme d'ors froids rôdant" --the celebrated "synaesthetic" perception of the Symbolists seems to work only rarely in the service of sensory vividness) or to be modifying in such ways ("expirer comme un diamant," "semer de rubis le doute," "une danseuse apparue/ Tourbillon de mousseline ou/ Fureur éparses en écumes"). The detail often modifies unimaginable things ("filigrane bleu de l'âme") or things explicitly not there ("une pourpre s'apprête/ À ne tendre royal que mon absent tombeau"). The general object of such writing is to produce an "effet" while obscuring as much as possible its causes in the world --the object or event-- and in the poem, the poet's moves or transitions: "l'art suprême, ici, consiste à laisser voir . . . qu'on est en extase, sans avoir montré comment on s'élevait ver ces cimes."[19]

These tactics are plain in even the simplest poems, most nearly descriptive in situation. The obvious example is "L'Après-midi d'un faune," which does, in fact, contain one of Mallarmé's rare sharply focussed images:

> Tu sais, ma passion, que, pourpre et déjà mûre,
> Chaque grenade éclate et d'abeilles murmure;
> Et notre sang, épris de qui le va saisir,
> Coule pour tout l'essaim éternel du désir.

And there is a moment of genuine sexual passion:

> Je t'adore, courroux des vierges, ô délice
> Farouche du sacré fardeau nu qui se glisse
> Pour fuir ma lèvre en feu buvant, comme un éclair
> Tressaille! la frayeur secrète de la chair:
> Des pieds de l'inhumaine au coeur de la timide
> Que délaisse à la fois une innocence, humide
> De larmes folles ou de moins tristes vapeurs.

Despite the sensory detail, however, there is no concreteness in this second passage, no definition; the detail is entirely subordinate to mood, and this is true of most of the poem, except that the mood, in keeping with the theme of illusion, is usually vaguer and less intense. The poem, indeed, is full of concrete diction, but there is little realized Sicilian décor; there is only an "atmosphere," even in the descriptive passages:

> Si clair,
> Leur incarnat léger, qu'il voltige dans l'air,
> Assoupi de sommeils touffus.
>
> Ne murmure point d'eau que ne verse ma flûte
> Au bosquet arrosé d'accords; et le seul vent
> Hors des deux tuyaux prompt à s'exhaler avant
> Qu'il disperse le son dans une pluie aride,
> C'est, à l'horizon pas remué d'une ride,
> Le visible et serein souffle artificiel
> De l'inspiration, qui regagne le ciel.

In the first passage, the figure works to dissipate the concreteness of "incarnat léger"; in the second, the explicit statement ("ne murmure point d'eau," "le seul vent") deflates the concreteness of the figures.

An earlier but more characteristically serene poem is "Soupir":

> Mon âme vers ton front où rêve, ô calme soeur,
> Un automne jonché de taches de rousseur,
> Et vers le ciel errant de ton oeil angélique
> Monte, comme dans un jardin mélancolique,
> Fidèle, un blanc jet d'eau soupire vers l'Azur!
> --Vers l'Azur attendri d'Octobre pâle et pur

Qui mire aux grands bassins sa langueur infinie
Et laisse, sur l'eau morte où la fauve agonie
Des feuilles erre au vent et creuse un froid sillon,
Se traîner le soleil jaune d'un long rayon.

We seem to have an autumn landscape here, but hardly a landscape of this world. It is an autumn that is dreamed in the brow of a woman (or does "un automne" itself "rêve"?), and that mirrors its languor (or is it l'Azur . . . Qui mire"?). We have "rousseur" but in "taches"; "le ciel" but "errant"; "jet d'eau" but "soupire"; "fauve" but "agonie"; "le soleil jaune" but "[laissé] se traîner." The poem is a single syntactical movement, a sigh, but the kernel thought is so obscured by parentheses ("monte" is lost from "âme," "jet d'eau" from "comme," "le soleil" from "laisse") that the modification blurs rather than sharpens --nothing is really defined. The concreteness of the details dissipates amid the emotional resonances of "calme," "Fidèle," and "attendri," on one hand, and "taches," "langueur," "morte," "agonie," and "se traîner," on the other. The sonnet "La Chevelure" is Shakespearian not only in its form, but in its convoluted figurativeness.[20] I quote the first two stanzas:

La chevelure vol d'une flamme à l'extrême
Occident de désirs pour la tout déployer
Se pose (je dirais mourir un diadème)
Vers le front couronné son ancien foyer

Mais sans or soupirer que cette vive nue
L'ignition du feu toujours intérieur
Originellement la seule continue
Dans le joyau de l'oeil véridique ou rieur

Since the passage (and indeed the entire poem) is without punctuation of any sort, we must assume that the grammatical ambiguity present in nearly every line is deliberate. The most plausible syntactical core seems quite pointless: "la chevelure, pour déployer, se pose vers le front; mais continue." For Mallarmé, however, syntax is not a way of

defining (as it has been for two thousand years of Western thought) but of blurring and confusing. Here the grammatical formlessness allows a remarkable instability of metaphor. The procedure seems to be associative: the lady's hair is a bird and a flame, and this brings to mind the sun. Since it is the sunset, it is the occident "de desirs," the connotations of which are picked up in "déployer" (as if before bed) and then "mourir," making the flame, finally, also a flame of desire (the speaker's or the lady's?). "Se pose" and "vers" return us to flight, but a new figure is introduced between verb and preposition with "diadème" and "couronné," a figure suggested by "déployer" --that the hair can be let down reminds the speaker that it is put up. This figure in turn gives way to the brow as "ancien foyer," which picks up something of the sun (the sun's home, the orient) and the fire. These connotations make the "or" (suggested by "couronné") also a light or lamp, but a light not needed even though the hair is a cloud and night (suggested by "Occident de desirs" and "mourir") is falling: the flame of desire continues in the lady's eye (moving down from hair and brow), which is a jewel.

These various figures do not fight each other; they participate in the creation of a feeling, an atmosphere of warmth, latent sexuality, and, as always, mysteriousness. But there is no motive; no woman, no hair. One is thankful for the title. So far, indeed, from valuing concrete immediacy, Mallarmé believed the reader's greatest delight to be in gradually discovering just what the object of the poet's attention is (see Note 9). The reader may wish to try his luck on the following sonnet:

O rêveuse, pour que je plonge
Au pur délice sans chemin
Sache, par un subtil mensonge,
Garder mon aile dans ta main.
Une fraîcheur de crépuscule
Te vient à chaque battement
Dont le coup prisonnier recule
L'horizon délicatement.
Vertige! voici que frissonne
L'espace comme un grand baiser
Qui, fou de naître pour personne,
Ne peut jaillir ni s'apaiser.
Sens-tu le paradis farouche
Ainsi qu'un rire enseveli
Se couler du coin de ta bouche
Au fond de l'unanime pli![21]
Le sceptre des rivages roses
Stagnants sur les soirs d'or ce l'est,
Ce blanc vol fermé que tu poses
Contre le feu d'un bracelet.

The characteristic I have have been describing, sensory unreality, cannot be separated from the other I offered earlier, the impression of deep significance. This impression is partly due to the presence of large abstractions ("néant," "mystère," "orgueil," la fatale loi," le Jeu suprême"), but also partly to Mallarmé's use of the anti-concrete tactics I have mentioned --the recurrence of certain words, the unnatural but striking modifiers, the rapid shifts of focus and convoluted syntax (suggesting complex movement of thought)-- all the while maintaining a more or less consistent tone, and usually a tone of oracular seriousness. One obvious reason a writer may have for making the object of his description slightly odd or otherwise not allowing it a full sensory life of its own is that he means to alert us to a meaning beyond the purely descriptive. To say, as I have, that Mallarmé is primarily a metaphorical and symbolical writer is, in fact, to imply the primacy of the abstract idea in his work. And yet the poems are thoroughly opaque. It is perhaps through his manner of making details <u>seem</u> to resonate with implicit significance that Mallarmé had his most

considerable impact on poetic style;[22] however, I have not the linguistic competence to take up the inextricably related debate about his conceptual obscurity (as a wise man said, "wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen"). I will only register the observation that there are poets who have not had to give up descriptive vitality in order to treat important subjects.

Although Mallarmé may have been the "purest" and most influentual of the Symbolists, his style did not represent the only alternative for the turn-of-the-century writer, nor is it the best the Symbolist movement offers; Rimbaud is a radically different sort of poet, and both Rimbaud and Valéry, although infected to a degree by the ideas that crippled Mallarmé,[23] are greater poets. Rimbaud did not mix well in Parisian literary circles, for he was by temperament not a follower of fashion, and certainly no aesthete. The style of his early poems is intensely personal, and yet takes a delight in the sensations of the real, physical world:

> Les bons vergers à l'herbe bleue,
> Aux pommiers tors!
> Comme on les sent toute une lieue
> Leurs parfums forts!
>
> Nous regagnerons le village
> Au ciel mi-noir;
> Et ça sentira le laitage
> Dans l'air du soir;
>
> Ça sentira l'étable, pleine
> De fumiers chauds,
> Pleine d'un lent rythme d'haleine,
> Et de grands dos
>
> Blanchissant sous quelque lumière;
> Et, tout là-bas,
> Une vache fientra, fière,
> A chaque pas . . .[24]

And Rimbaud's range of emotion and subject matter is considerable; when this style is brought to bear on society, the result is keenly-observed, wide-ranging satire quite unimaginable in Mallarmé. The poetry after "Le Bateau ivre" does tend to turn away from the ordinary world, but in a quest for still greater immediacy and novelty of perception.[25] Whereas Mallarmé sought to get outside the language of ordinary experience by emptying it of meaning and direct reference, by making his poem as little of the world as possible, Rimbaud's method was to overload the moment with sensation, in an effort to make poetry more intensely real than life itself (the reader may examine the astonishing "Les Chercheuses de poux"). He turned to free verse and the prose poem as more immediate ways of recording experience, and he sought further to disrupt conventional modes of seeing and feeling, which he thought to be stultifying and clumsy, by structural techniques of "dérèglement de tous les sens": dream-like drifting of focus, for example, and juxtaposition of strikingly disparate perceptions —both methods no doubt encouraged by tobacco, insomnia, and hunger. I quote "Marine" to illustrate the latter method (working by way of ordinary metaphor) and "Larme," which displays something of both methods:

> Les chars d'argent et de cuivre--
> Les proues d'acier et d'argent--
> Battent l'écume,--
> Soulèvent les souches des ronces.
> Les courants de la lande,
> Et les ornières immenses du reflux,
> Filent circulairement vers l'est,
> Vers les piliers de la forêt,
> Vers les fûts de la jetée
> Dont l'angle est heurté par des tourbillons de lumière.
>
> Loin des oiseaux, des troupeaux, des villageoises,
> Je buvais, accroupi dans quelque bruyère
> Entourée de tendres bois de noisetiers,

Par un brouillard d'après-midi tiède et vert.

Que pouvais-je boire dans cette jeune Oise,
Ormeaux sans voix, gazon sans fleurs, ciel couvert.
Que tirais-je à la gourde de colocase?
Quelque liqueur d'or, fade et qui fait suer.

Tel, j'eusse été mauvaise enseigne d'auberge.
Puis l'orage changea le ciel, jusqu'au soir.
Ce furent des pays noirs, des lacs, des perches,
Des colonnades sous la nuit bleue, des gares.

L'eau des bois se perdait sur des sables vierges.
Le vent, du ciel, jetait des glaçons aux mares ...
Or! tel qu'un pêcheur d'or ou de coquillages,
Dire que je n'ai pas eu souci de boire!

The style of Valéry, especially in the Album de vers anciens, was damaged by Mallarméan stylization, preciosity, and portentous opaqueness:

Mais toujours près de toi que le silence livre
Aux cris multipliés de tout le brut azur,
L'ombre de quelque page éparse d'aucun livre

In his best writing, however, the detail slips from "purity" into concreteness, and the ideas are clear, as in "Les Grenades,"

Dures grenades entr'ouvertes
Cédant à l'excès de vos grains,
Je crois voir des fronts souverains
Éclatés de leurs découvertes!

Si les soleils par vos subis,
O grenades entre-bâillées,
Vous ont fait d'orgueil travaillées
Craquer les cloisons de rubis,

Et que si l'or sec de l'écorce
À la demande d'une force
Crève en gemmes rouges de jus,

Cette lumineuse rupture
Fait rêver une âme que j'eus
De sa secrète achitecture.

where, although there is still an element of play (note the number of words that suggest [hand] grenades), the figure is both vivid and perspicuous. "Ébauche d'un serpent" is essentially abstract

metaphysical discourse ("l'univers n'est qu'un défaut/ Dans la pureté du Non-être!"), animated, however, by moments of sensuousness:

> Quel silence battu d'un cil!
> Mais quel souffle sous le sein sombre
> Que mordait l'Arbre de son ombre!
> L'autre brillait comme un pistil!
> --"Siffle, siffle!" me chantait-il!
> Et je sentais frémir le nombre,
> Tout le long de mon fouet subtil,
> Des ces replis dont je m'encombre:
> Ils roulaient depuis le béryl
> De ma crête, jusqu'au péril!

"Le Cimetière marin" (although, again, fraught with aesthetic patterning,[26] and clearly Mallarméan in its attempt to obscure transitions of thought) displays a more complete co-mingling of sensuousness and intelligence. The poem's conceptual burden is carried symbolically by the elements of a real seascape. And that burden is considerable; the poem is, in effect, a commentary on the Mallarméan attempt to create an unnatural cleavage between literature and life. The speaker finally rejects both pure thought and deliberately artificial artistic perception (attitudes associated in the poem with serenity, purity, eternality, and immobility) in favor of fluctuant and physical life: "Brisez, mon corps, cette forme pensive!/ Buvez, mon sein, la naissance du vent!" Such lines as these on the "peuple vague aux racines des arbres" in the cemetery represent a marked recovery from artificiality and obscurity:

> Ils ont fondu dans une absence épaisse,
> L'argile rouge a bu la blanche espèce,
> Le don de vivre a passé dans les fleurs!
> Où sont des morts les phrases familières,
> L'art personnel, les âmes singulières?
> La larve file où se formaient les pleurs.

Les cris aigus des filles chatouillées,
Les yeux, les dents, les paupières mouillées,
Le sein charmant qui joue avec le feu,
Le sang qui brille aux aux lèvres qui se rendent,
Les derniers dons, les doigts qui les défendent,
Tout va sous terre et rentre dans le jeu!

3.

The characteristics of the Imagist movement, the starting point for English modernism, are well known: extreme brevity, depersonalized voice, vers libre, avoidance of abstract thought. The Imagist subject is invariably an instant of consciousness; this narrowing of scope made possible an unprecedented concentration on sensory sharpness, the movement's chief contribution to English poetry. There is, however considerable heterogeneity of style within the movement, at least partly because there was no final agreement as to whether, of the limited kinds of consciousness amenable to Imagist presentation, the sensory-descriptive or the emotional-suggestive was to be emphasized. In a recent essay, Patricia Gallivan has discussed the conflicting views of the movement's founders F. S. Flint, who, following Mallarmé and Arthur Symons, saw the "image" as suggestive of something infinite and unseizable, and T. E. Hulme, who saw it as the outline of the object fixed firmly in space in a way that would affirm its realness and finiteness.[27] In practice, of course, even the fuzzy and sentimental Georgians came closer to Mallarmé's ethereality than most of the Imagists; but there is this connection: with the Imagists, when we speak of connotation we do not usually mean "feeling" or "emotion" in the ordinary sense, but something closer to the "aesthetic emotion" of

Mallarmé. At the same time, unsuggestive, purely descriptive poems like William's "As the cat/ climbed over..." are rare. The aim seems to have been a compromise, a style that could affirm at once the realness of the real and its mysteriousness; in a phrase used by Richard Aldington of H.D., "accurate mystery."

One way of achieving this was the sometime-Parnassian method of selecting subjects that traditionally tend to be considered mysterious anyway --beautiful women, swans, panthers, peacocks, scenes from the orient and ancient Greece-- and making their concreteness felt. But however accurate their presentation, these things are not much of the real world: the method runs foul of the various modernist dicta against the "poetic subject." A less artificial and much more common method was to be cryptically ordinary. A version of this method figures in French Symbolism, but it could as easily have been suggested to the Imagists by translations from oriental verse, much in vogue at the turn of the century. Whereas the oriental reader expects from a certain popular genre of verse nothing more than brief glimpses of beauty of feeling, the prospect of words arranged in lines leads the Western reader to expect that a single, important statement will be made by the whole, that the details will be at a high level of relevance to this throughout, and that the poem will close definitely and in full understanding. Oriental verse is so mysterious to us partly because, although it consistently violates these conditions, we cannot shake the expectations; we assume significance:

> I stamp the snow to seek the wood-cutter of the hill
> But the wood-cutter of the hill has stamped the snow and departed.
> All the way are the tracks of his grass shoes,
> As my search leads me into the depth of the pine woods.

So runs a Chinese poem from the eighteenth century.[28] W. C. Williams is one of many parasites on the Western tradition:

> I have eaten
> the plums
> that were in
> the icebox
>
> and which
> you were probably
> saving
> for breakfast
>
> Forgive me
> they were delicious
> so sweet
> and so cold.

Such writing weakens the tradition of thoughtfulness and significance in poetry by depending upon it in an irresponsible way. Even if one sees this, one cannot help liking a little the poem's sense of wonder at the ordinary; but this trick can only be played on most of us a few times; it is a mere curiousity appealing to our spiritual laziness.

However, oriental verse, specifically the Japanese haiku, did suggest a third, more interesting approach to accurate mystery. The haiku, we are told, is meant to suggest the mystical interpenetration of man and nature. The method seems to be to isolate an ordinary moment of sensory consciousness by calling attention to the very act of perception:

> The fallen blosson files back to its branch;
> A butterfly.

This is the haiku that inspired Pound's famous "In a Station of the Metro": "The apparition of these faces in a crowd;/ Petals on a wet black bough."[29] Amy Lowell's "Autumn Haze" is similar: "Is it a dragonfly or a maple leaf/ That settles softly down upon the water?"[30] Pound writes of "In a Station" that "in a poem of this sort, one is

trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself or darts into a thing inward and subjective."[31] One way of isolating this moment is also a way of giving resonance or luminousness to the ordinary object: seeing it in terms of another object. Rimbaud was one of the first to practice the method; one of the first to describe it was Ford Madox Ford:

> The putting of one thing in juxtaposition with the other, that seems to me much more the business of the poet today than setting down on paper what he thinks of the Brangaene, not because any particular lesson may be learned, but because such juxtapositions suggest emotions.[32]

As a young man even Winters was writing as if this were the essential method of poetry; and the characterization of those "emotions" Ford speaks of, in Winters' account of the "image" (really, here, a type of figure), brings out the link with the Mallarméan school:

> There are yet other persons, fewer in number and of finer vision, who can take the outline from the mist and make it stand alone. This is done, in poetry, by seeing and placing in juxtaposition two or more observations that have one quality in common . . . they will fuse at the point where they are the same, or, to be more exact, <u>they will be the same at one point</u>. These two perceptions, coming together with an almost infinite speed across the mental distances that naturally lie between two separate observations . . . cause a kind of mental vibration that is known as aesthetic emotion.[33]

The method is clearly observable, even before the meetings and manifestoes, in T. E. Hulme's "Images":

> Old houses were scaffolding once
> and workmen whistling.
>
> *
>
> Her skirt lifted as a dark mist
> From the columns of amethyst.
>
> *
>
> Sounds fluttered,
> like bats in the dusk.
>
> *
>
> The flounced edge of shirt,
> recoiling like waves off a cliff.

Rhetorically, the last three of these images are conventional similes in which both terms are concrete; however, the terms of the two skirt figures are unconventionally remote from each other. The normal Imagist practice, most evident in the first of Hulme's images (not as much in the haiku by Pound and Lowell), is to bring out not (or not only) the obvious point of relationship or "fusion," as Winters has it, but the "mental distance," the juxtaposition of the perceptions. As in Rimbaud, we often get similes and metaphors without an obvious and restricted principle of concurrrence of terms. The perceptions are meant to mingle but also to strain slightly, without falling apart, to interanimate in evocative ways. So long as the language is precise and the perceptions sufficiently but not excessively disparate, the rhetorical form is of small consequence. Most commonly we find similes, as in Winters' "I Sat Alone": "A blade of grass was pale,/ Like a woman far away"; or from the surrealistic "My Memory": "My memory is falling/ Like the snow . . . . I found sheer women talking/ Like surf on a shore"; or H.D. from "Hermes of the Ways": "The hard sand breaks,/ And the grains of it/ Are clear as wine"; or Eliot: "When the evening is spread out against the sky/ Like a patient etherized upon a table". H. D.'s famous "Oread",however, is a metaphor:

> Whirl up, sea--
> Whirl up your pointed pines,
> Splash your great pines
> On our rocks,
> Hurl your green over us,
> Cover us with your pools of fir.

And the early work of Eliot is studded with Imagist metaphor: "his soul stretched tight across the skies/ That fade behind a city block." John Gould Fletcher's "The Skaters" gives us a metaphor and a simile:

Black swallows swooping or gliding
In a flurry of entangled loops and curves;
The skaters skim over the frozen river.
And the grinding click of their skates as they
impinge upon the surface,
Is like the brushing together of thin wing-tips of silver.

A number of Imagist juxtapositions are not figures but simply shifts in perspective, like the first of Winters' early "Two Songs of Advent":

On the desert, between pale mountains, our cries--
Far whispers creeping through an ancient shell.

Or Pound's "Gentildonna":

She passed and left no quiver in the veins, who now
Moving among the trees, and clinging in the air she severed,
Fanning, the grass she walked on there endures:
Grey olives beneath a rain cold sky.

Or the last stanza of F. S. Flint's "Cones":

The quiet in the room
bears patiently
a footfall on the street.

Williams' "The Young Housewife" juxtaposes by both perspective shift and striking analogy:

At ten A.M. the young housewife
moves about in negligee behind
the wooden walls of her husband's house
I pass solitary in my car.

Then again she comes to the curb
to call the ice-man, fish-man, and stands
shy, uncorseted, tucking in
stray ends of hair, and I compare her
to a fallen leaf.

The noiseless wheels of my car
rush with a crackling sound over
dried leaves as I bow and pass smiling.

The focus in the first stanza shifts from the negligee to the husband and wooden walls, and then from the composite scene to the car passing in the street. The second stanza brings together the housewife and a

fallen leaf; the third, the car, actual fallen leaves in the street, and (by implication) the housewife. And finally, the Imagist poem's title can be one of the juxtaposed perceptions:

At Evening
Like leaves my feet passed by.

Desert
The tented autumn, gone!

Sometimes, as in these last poems by Winters and in "Oread," the juxtaposition overwhelms the perceptions themselves; sharpness is lost and we are left, as in Mallarmé, with only the suggestive "mental vibration." Often, however, we get both the vibration and the real-world perception, which many come to feel symbolic of some deep truth. I offer two examples. F. G. Tuckerman's sonnet I:10 is clearly not influenced by Symbolism or Aestheticism; it displays a strong element of "emotion" in the ordinary sense. Yet the poem's conclusion achieves a feeling remarkably close to that of the Imagists by its use, although probably accidental, of mysterious juxtaposition:

> An upper chamber in a darkened house,
> Where, ere his footsteps reached ripe manhood's brink,
> Terror and anguish were his lot to drink;
> I cannot rid the thought nor hold it close
> But dimly dream upon that man alone:
> Now though the autumn clouds most softly pass,
> The cricket chides beneath the doorstep stone
> And greener than the season grow the grass.
> Nor can I drop my lids nor shade my brows,
> But there he stands beside the lifted sash;
> And with a swooning of the heart, I think
> Where the black shingles slope to meet the boughs
> And, shattered on the roof like smallest snow,
> The tiny petals of the mountain ash.

Despite the unifying tendency of meter and rhyme, the poem's last three lines are set off from the rest by the break in grammar, and by the minuteness of the perception, strikingly different from the relative

generality of the lines preceeding. The perception feels symbolic by virtue of several things: its placement at the end, where the poem should be most emphatically clinching its point, the obvious sincerety of the speaker's emotion up to then, and perhaps more than anything the mental vibration created by the shift in perspective itself. But if it is a symbol, it is a purely private one; it is impossible to guess what is symbolized. Again in Williams' "To Awaken an Old Lady" we have a sharp perception set against something more general, in fact, an abstraction:

> Old age is
> a flight of small
> cheeping birds
> skimming
> bare trees
> above snow glaze.
> gaining and failing
> they are buffeted
> by a dark wind--
> But what?
> On harsh weedstalks
> the flock has rested,
> the snow
> is covered with broken
> seedhusks
> and the wind tempered
> by a shrill
> piping of plenty.

The mystery here arises from the juxtaposition (by way of metaphor) of "old age" with the finely and immediately ("But what?") observed birds, of elements connoting life with elements connoting death throughout, and of the whole poem with its title. None of the juxtapositions illuminate the subject of old age in a comprehensible way. The mystery makes the perception of the birds seem symbolic, and it may well be so, for Williams; for us, the detail remains as brilliant and inscrutable as life.

4.

It is true that not all Imagist poems work by juxtaposing disparate perceptions, although it seems to me that the most interesting do. It is also true that such juxtaposition need not result in mystery. I mentioned in my introductory essay a more traditional sort of juxtapostion, a tool of the ironist, that results in bathos. One can find Imagist poems working in this way; Richard Aldington's "Evening":

> The chimneys, rank on rank,
> Cut the clear sky;
> The moon,
> With a rag of gauze about her loins
> Poses among them, an awkward Venus--
>
> And here am I looking wantonly at her
> Over the kitchen sink.

Pound's "The Bath Tub":

> As a bath tub lined with white porcelain,
> When the hot water gives out or goes tepid,
> So is the slow cooling of our chivalrous passion,
> O my much praised but not-altogether-satisfactory lady.

But this more or less intellectual and public (as comedy must be) use of detail is not the usual Imagist way. The usual way is mysterious juxtaposition, which by its very nature is private and anti-intellectual: it works by eluding precise connections between things, and thus paraphraseable significance. Clearly such juxtapostion cannot form the core of any more thoughtful method, unless (and this is only slightly more thoughtful) as <u>part of</u> a dramatic presentation of the eccentric workings of the mind, as in the various forms of "stream of consciousness" (see Rimbaud, for instance, or Eliot's "Rhapsody on a Windy Night"). There are, however, impressive modern poems where methods something like those of the Imagists, although controlled by

ideas almost beyond recognition, work to make the ideas personal and vital. I will conclude by discussing two examples. First is Thomas Hardy's "During Wind and Rain":

They sing their dearest songs--
He, she, all of them --yea,
Treble and tenor and bass,
  And one to play;
With the candles mooning each face. ...
  Ah, no; the years O!
How the sick leaves reel down in throngs!

They clear the creeping moss--
Elders and juniors --aye,
Making the pathways neat
  And the garden gay;
And they build a shady seat. ...
  Ah, no; the years, the years;
See, the white storm-birds wing across!

They are blithely breakfasting all--
Men and maidens --yea,
Under the summer tree,
  With a glimpse of the bay,
While pet foul come to the knee. ...
  Ah, no; the years O!
And the rotten rose is ripped from the wall.

They change to a high new house,
He, she, all of them --aye,
Clocks and carpets and chairs
  On the lawn all day,
And the brightest things that are theirs. ...
  Ah, no; the years, the years;
Down their carved names the rain-drop ploughs.[34]

The obvious resemblance between this poem and those I have been discussing is that it consists almost entirely of sensory detail; the immediately remarkable difference is that this poem is formal; that is, it consists of a number of constants or forms.[35] A consideration of the resemblance will lead to one of the difference.

The poem gives us something like a series of snapshots, but this is not to say that we have a series of brilliant images. Rather, details

of low sensory force and particularity are quietly composed, in each stanza, into a single picture. One can scarely see or hear the singers in the first four lines, though their beings and voices are defined, until the fifth line lends the scene some sensory reality. The closest thing to an image in the second stanza is "They clear the creeping moss," but the emphasis there seems to be on the action qua action and on the emotional and conceptual significance of "creeping." "Pathways neat," "garden gay," and "shady seat" are flat and deliberately domestic perceptions. The details in stanza three also seem deliberately unspecific; what, for instance, does a "summer tree" look like? The detail in the final stanza is on the whole the most tangible of all, by virtue of the unusual situation; but the tangiblity is subdued to meaning: the pieces of human life, suddenly viewed in the bright light and from the huge perspective of the outdoors, are revealed as pathetic knick-knacks. It is true that the subordination of vividness to meaning in Hardy's poem is not as strict as one finds in Renaissance poems on the same subject, like Nashe's "A Litany in Time of Plague":

> Beauty is but a flower
> Which wrinkles will devour;
> Brightness falls from the air;
> Queens have died young and fair;
> Dust hath closed Helen's eye;
> I am sick, I must die--
> Lord, have mercy on us.

The entire passage is generalized; there is no perception of nature; the wrinkles devour beauty, not the flower. Hardy's details have more life of their own. They have not, however, the autonomy of Williams' details, which cannot transcend their own particularity:

> a flight of small
> cheeping birds
> skimming
> bare trees
> above a snow glaze.

Hardy's poem is not his perceptions, but his act of understanding them. His sensory detail is subordinated to an abstract, publically discussable idea (people doing everyday things together in the face of time); they are not allowed to resonate freely in the reader's private world. This subordination has directly to do with the poem's formality.

The controlling form is that to which one refers in saying that the poem is "rational": the form of the argument. We have a set of particular instances governed by a generalization about time implicit in the refrain, "Ah, no; the years O!" The order and number of stanzas is further governed by other principles of following, although they are less readily perceived and less rational. Two principles can be seen in the development of the grammatical subjects though the poem. One is the individual's perception of his human environment as he ages: the child sees people; the youth "elders and juniors"; the young man, "men and maidens"; and the old man, again just people. The other is a particular to general movement: "he, she, all of them" in stanza one feel like particular people (the line following specifies them literally and rhythmically); elders and juniors is much less specific, men and maidens nearly as general as possible; the effect of this is to load the returning "he, she, all of them" with universality. Another developmental principle is the order of the seasons. The poem begins in winter, or so the indoor activity seems to suggest; the candles suggest early darkness and perhaps Christmas. The second stanza gives us the activites of spring, preparatory to summer, especially clearing the moss and building the seat; and the third clearly is summer. Whether or not it is customary to change houses in autumn, the final scene feels in context like autumn; the raindrop may be the first of winter. Hardy

does not follow the spring through winter pattern traditionally compared, in poems on the ravages of time, to the life of man, because he is a post-Romantic sceptic: the rhythms of nature control to some extent the rhythms of human life, but nature is indifferent to man's finiteness; her rhythms continue implacably after those of man cease.

My point is that these forms harness the poem's detail to definite meaning. There are, however, a number of other forms present, many of which are bound up in the fact that the poem, clearly inspired by Shakespeare's "Hey, ho, the wind and the rain," is itself something of a song --surely the appropriateness of form to matter in stanza one underscores this. We have the song's well-defined lines; the repeated rhyme and metrical pattern; the self-contained stanzas, each taking up an event of more or less equal significance, distinct, yet clearly members of a set defined by a summary refrain; and we even have a secondary refrain: were the poem to be performed by soloist and chorus, the chorus would join in on the second line of each stanza, as well as on the sixth. The refrains get variation (a common feature of folk song), both rhetorical (two subjects are exchanged for three in the secondary refrain of the middle stanzas, and in the second and the last stanzas, "aye" is exchanged for "yea" and "the years" for "0" in the primary refrain) and metrical, which makes the music: the secondary refrains play bunched, choppy stresses (lines two and twenty-three) against looser, quasi-anapestic ones (five, sixteen), the primary refrains alternate an iamb and monosyllable against two iambs. The poem is carried along by variation and return. The musical structure is not merely a decoration of the rational one but contributes importantly to meaning. The clue to this is the apparent oddity of the poem's title:

in what sense, we might ask, during wind and rain, when much of the poem takes place is sunshine? The answer is that the poem means these moods to clash in grimly ironic juxaposition. The bright, small moments that make up human life are confronted with dark and inexorable time; the title lies ever behind the sunny moments. It is the song element that really makes these human moments live; it carries the note of community and of stoicism in the face of time: we sing during wind and rain.

The dark perspective is maintained through the poem in a striking way by the seventh line of each stanza, which gives us either wind or rain or both ("storm-birds"). The use of these lines is easily the poem's most untraditional element. The unusual placement of the refrain just before the end of the stanza increases the demand for a completing rhyme by occupying its natural position, but at the same time separates it from the rest of the stanza. The line is also set apart by its subject, syntax, and tone; its level of particularity is relatively high and its rhythm ominously slow and unmusical. These four lines are perceptions of a different order, decidedly undomestic, meant to mingle and strain with the rest of the stanza in the manner of Imagist lines. In Hardy's poem, however, the resonance produced by the juxtaposition, the "mental vibration," is controlled by the intellectual context of the generalizing refrain and by the clear ironic connection between the two perceptions involved. The precise bearing of the final lines is evident: each describes a natural event, set off from the human, involving change or destruction. Leaves, storm-birds, roses, and gravestones, moreover, have associations defined by tradition.

One should note, finally, that Hardy has not had to resort to vers libre to make these lines ominous; all are iambic tetrameter lines, all but the third a trochee and three iambs; the caesura falls after the second foot in all but the second. But the flexibility is remarkable. In line seven, "How the sick leaves reel down in throngs!", the unstressed "sick," since more heavily accented than the unstressed syllable preceeding it, almost forms a spondee with "leaves." The unstressed "reel," as it falls immediately after the caesura, gets more stress than "leaves" and nearly as much as "down." The effect is of four slow stresses of mounting force, and we find this again in line fourteen, which seems to approach prose by playing the phrase units "storm-birds" and "wing across" against the metrical units. The anapests and alliteration in line twenty-one achieve a feeling of irresistible violence. The poem's final line is the slowest of all, by virtue of the very heavy first syllable, the near equality of stress in the next three syllables, the tension of metrical and phrase unit in "rain-drop," and the adjacent p's in the final foot (which forces a very deliberate pronunciation of the terrible "ploughs").

Hardy's career spans the periods of both Symbolism and Imagism, poetries of suggestiveness and apparent but specious complexity. My point in analyzing his poem has been that, while it pretends to less profundity than most of the poems I have mentioned in this essay, there is in fact more discussable complexity and personal feeling, because the poem is controlled by thought. My second example, #14 in J. V. Cunningham's sequence "To What Strangers, What Welcome," although a much slighter poem, will illustrate a similar point.

I write only to say this,
In a syllabic dryness
As inglorious as I feel:
Sometime before drinking time
For the first time in some weeks
I heard of you, the casual
News of a new life, silence
Of unconfronted feeling
And maples in the slant sun
The gay colour of decay.
Was it unforgivable,
My darling, that you loved me?

This poem, by contrast with Hardy's, is almost devoid of sensory detail. It is in a plain style, appropriate for accommodation to feelings arising from human limitation. Here those feelings attach to the memory of a woman with whom the speaker has had a brief relationship and to whom he addresses the poem as a kind of letter; we have, in effect, an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. It is often Cunningham's knack to use a generalized style in a personal and immediate way: in this poem, the direct address of the epistle works toward this end. Also, the plain style's note of conviction is muted somewhat by the syllabic meter, a perception to which the speaker himself directs us; and there are some rather private syntactical moves. At line seven there is a break in logic, a shift, without connective, from the public event to the private feeling, enforced by the line break: "silence." Line nine begins with a conjunction, but in fact is another sudden shift in perspective, from feeling to immediate physical situation, a late afternoon in autumn. The effect of this shift is to make the image of the maples, all the more startling and vivid against the plain background, feel symbolic of the speaker's spiritual state. The image makes the poem personal and immediate in a way it could not have been without it, even with the other elements I have mentioned. The

procedure owes much to the narrowing of focus and private connection-making of the Imagists.

One might want to say that the poem is indeed closer to the Imagists than to Hardy, that the image symbolizes emotion only. It is true that the poem is concerned with a mood to an extent that most plain, indeed most thought-controlled, poems are not. But here the emotion is complex and precise, the complexity and precision made possible by the presence of the speaker's intellect, controlling, in a way wholly uncharacteristic of the Symbolists and Imagists, the emotion and the suggestiveness of the image. The poem is personal, and, I believe, unusually suggestive, but in an intellectual sense. It is a stoical confrontation ("drinking time" suggests an attitude towards life) of a number of things: the inevitable element of regret in imperfect communion, the element of damaged pride in giving oneself impermanently, the casualness of change, the fact that time is the only permanence but inscrutable, and that time is at once the agent of regret and of indifference. The poem does not develop these themes, but they are there; and the autumn image has a great deal to do with this. It captures in more or less defineable ways the regret, impermanence, casual change, inscrutability, and indifference; "the gay colour of decay" is a subdued but grim irony of both personal and universal significance. In light of what precedes, the poem's concluding question, following immediately and without connectives upon the image, is moving indeed, and more profound than pure emotion could be.

The image is not simply an "objective correlative"; that it evokes the emotion it does depends upon the rest of the poem, which coheres by

thought and is abstract: "inglorious," "the casual/ News of a new life," "silence/ Of unconfronted feeling," "unforgivable." Unlike the images which conclude the stanzas of Hardy's "During Wind and Rain," which are related to the poem's theme simply as instances of the explicit point that time passes, Cunningham's image is made to carry the point within itself. It is a post-Symbolist image.

CHAPTER III THE IDEA OF "POST-SYMBOLIST IMAGERY"

> The rational soul and the sensible soul are united....
>
> —Winters
> Forms of Discovery

In this essay I will consider some modern American poems in light of Winters' notion of post-Symbolist imagery, but I want first to look at his general account, or rather accounts, of it. He writes in Forms of Discovery of "Le Cimetière Marin" and "Ebauche d'un Serpent":

> The language is often sensory and conceptual at the same time, for example in this line describing the sea: "Masse de calme et visible réserve." The line should be considered carefully. Calme and réserve are both nouns indicating potency; but both suggest the possibility of immediate act. They are metaphysical abstractions; or to be more precise, they are clearly substitutes for the metaphysical abstraction potency, substitutes brought closer to the visual, very close indeed when we remember that the line describes the sea, and substitutes which suggest the abstraction act, or actuality, but act in visible form. Masse and visible render the perception clearly visible, make it clearly the sea. That is, the sea is rendered as visibly the embodiment of potency on the verge of becoming actual. As a visual image, the line is brilliant; as an intellectual perception it is profound; the visual and the intellectual are simultaneous --they cannot be separated in fact. (p. 252)

He says of the final stanza of Stevens' "Sunday Morning":

> We live in an old chaos of the sun,
> Or old dependency of day and night,
> Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,
> Of that wide water, inescapable.
>
> Every phrase in this passage is beautiful at the descriptive level, but the descriptive and the philosophical cannot be separated: chaos, solitude, unsponsored, free, inescapable

work at both levels. The sensory detail is not ornament; it is a part of the essential theme . . . .

> And, in the isolation of the sky,
> At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
> Ambiguous undulations as they sink
> Downward to darkness on extended wings . . . .

These pigeons are different from Shakespeare's lark in sonnet XXIX. The lark was merely a lark, with the author's personal sentimentality imposed upon it arbitrarily. The pigeons embody an idea as well as a feeling, and the idea motivates the feeling. The pigeons cannot be separated from the idea: they are a part of the universe which the poet is trying to understand, and at this point they are an efficiently representative part. The rational soul and the sensible soul are united: we do not have the purely rational soul of Jonson nor the purely sensible soul of Pound: and there is no decoration. (pp. 275-76)

There is, then, a new kind of imagery that is sensory and conceptual at the same time; Renaissance rationality has been reasserted without weakening Romantic sensuousness. This notion is less neatly manageable than it may at first appear, but it is, I believe, fundamentally both accurate and illuminating.

1.

The last sentence in the Valéry passage gives us three criteria for post-Symbolist imagery, and the Stevens passage bears them out: living sensory detail (that is, imagery), a theme of some intellectual scope, and these emerging simultaneously from the same phrase. This last, the criterion of simultaneity, is decidedly the most restrictive. Perfectly fused and parallel development of descriptive and intellectual levels is rare. However, Winters is sometimes less strict in his definition: "the purely metaphysical language and the language of sensory perception

he uses do. In a long essay on Yeats (Forms, 204-234) he suggests that symbols are either "medieval" (one to one, as in allegory) or "Mallarméan" (one to an unlimited number of possible "meanings," depending on the reader's capacity for association). It is true that poetry, and especially English poetry (in response to empiricism and sensationism), has increasingly tended away, over the past three hundred years, from a symbolism that takes the abstraction symbolized as fixed and valid apart from the experience on which it is based, and towards a greater emphasis on the natural details that make up that experience. Since both nature and human perception of it, as the Romantics discovered, are bewilderingly various and complex, this has also meant an emphasis upon uniqueness of perception and a tendency towards greater suggestiveness. In his younger days Winters himself applauded these tendencies:

> Allegory at its weakest, and to some extent in all its manifestations, is merely an attempt to give concrete body to an abstraction, while preserving the limits of the abstraction. It does not attempt to redissolve the abstraction onto the original body of experience . . . . The sound work of art, however, is as far as possible (allowing for such obvious facts as that language itself represents a degree of abstraction, which a poet overcomes insofar as he is a poet) not an abstraction from experience but a concentration of experience, and the universality of its scale is pretty much in proportion to the degree in which one cannot draw from it abstract conclusions.[2]

In practice, however, even post-Renaissance symbols, insofar as they are symbols, are more medieval than Mallarméan; one can speak of their meaning, singular. One cannot always wholly encapsulate them, especially if they are sensorily realized as a part of the writer's subject or situation, and made somehow to partake of the suggestiveness of life itself; but this does not alter the fact that there is a primary

reflect upon each other, so that we have the impression of a more or less continuous texture";[1] "we have a theme of some intellectual scope with enough abstract statement to support the theme; theme and abstract statement charge the imagery with meaning" (Forms, 259). The possibilities allowed for here are that imagery may be charged with meaning by interwoven abstractions, or even by a prior abstract context: the significance of the imagery at the end of "Sunday Morning," in fact, has been prepared by relatively abstract and explicit argument, and this kind of argument is even more dominant in "Ebauche d'un serpent."

These two methods, the seeding of descriptive language with conceptually suggestive language and the placing of descriptive language in a predominantly abstract context, will be recognized as the chief methods of ordinary symbolism. Winters writes of Tuckerman's "The Cricket": "the cricket has become a symbol for non-human nature and for the primitive and sub-human in human nature . . . . The theme has been sufficiently established in conceptual terms; it permeates the imagery; . . . the imagery of the last section has no need of explanation, and it is not ornament" (Forms, 261-2). The imagery is not ornament because "The Cricket" is a descriptive poem; it has no need of explanation because there has been prior establishment of the theme that makes the cricket a symbol. My general point is that the method by which a good many poems come to post-Symbolism is simply contextual symbolism.

This may seem odd to those who feel that modern literature, in its complex multivalency, has closed off the possiblity of the single correct interpretation. Winters' own account of symbolism, indeed, seems to work against the claim on such grounds, or at least the terms

symbolic function. The meaning of modern symbols is discussable but not fully capturable; it is so of symbols in fiction (the fox in D.H. Lawrence's story of that name, for instance); it is so of Valéry's seascape, Cunningham's maples, and Stevens' pigeons.

2.

We should not really marvel that in the passages by Valéry and Stevens the details are a "part of the essential theme"; the poems stem from the Romantic landscape tradition; details are the explicit subject of the passages. But if we go back and consider the first mentions of post-Symbolism we encounter in Forms, we find ourselves considering quite a different kind of poetry. In George Herbert's "Church Monuments,"

> the quality of the language verges on what I shall endeavor later in this book to describe as post-Symbolist. The figures are not ornamental, neither are they intended to be wholly unvisualized; they are not symbols in the medieval sense, nor is the poem allegorical. The thought is wholly and clearly embodied in the figures, phrase by phrase, and it could not have been as well expressed any other way. (84)

Ben Jonson's "Hymn to Diana",

> has in it traces of the ornate style, yet it tends in the direction of what I shall later call the post-Symbolist style: we do not have theoretic statement followed by ornamental sensory detail, but intellectual and sensory detail are so intimately related that they exist as one and the same, simultaneously. (116)

Except for the emphasis on sensory vividness, the praise of simultaneous detail and concept here could have come from a New Critic praising the functionality of the conceit in a metaphysical poem. The fact that the detail is not ornamental in these poems has little to do with setting. The scene cannot be called the explicit focus here, the figures are too clear and central. These are Reniassance poems.

Now it is an important use of metaphor to depict the abstract in concrete terms, to increase the range of human perception addressed:

> Gut eats all day, and lechers all the night,
> So all his meat he tasteth over twice:
> And, striving so to double his delight,
> He makes himself a thoroughfare of vice.
> Thus in his belly can he change a sin,
> Lust it comes out, that gluttony went in.[3]

But here, as in most figures, the sensory level remains well below the surface. What is special about the poems Winters singles out is that they push the reader harder towards sensory construction than most Renaissance figures. This is true of the Herbert poem because of the sheer weight of unmodified substantives (nouns at what W. K. Wimsatt calls the "minimum-concrete level"[4]) suggesting worldliness, in the context of an eerily restrained warning about impending insubstantiality. In the Jonson poem, although some of the detail is formulary, the striking refrain of "excellently bright" creates a special resonance, an interest that is both intellectual and sensory in the details of the goddess' nature. Both effects are unusual, but not typically post-Romantic. Neither, for that matter, is Valéry's line, "Masse de calme et visible réserve," apart from its sensory context: it is a piece of figurative speech in which the abstraction "réserve" is modified by terms not normally applied to an abstraction.

It seems clear that post-Symbolist imagery can arise out of sensorily charged figurative situations, and not only out of conceptually charged descriptive ones.[5] Post-Symbolist figures represent a compromise between Imagism and Renaissance methods: there is vividness and suggestiveness not wholly dissipated by the conceptual connection between the terms of the figure (a "texture of irrelevance," John Crowe Ransom would say); but there is such a defineable connection at the core of the image. In such cases the figurative-descriptive distinction itself (and, as I shall suggest, the figurative-symbolic distinction) may become difficult to maintain; figures that are imagistic often become so by invoking a real descriptive situation that is implicitly present behind the poem. It is another special mark of the Herbert and Jonson poems, in view of the normal Renaissance practice, that they do this. This figure is from J. V. Cunningham:

> I drive eastward. The ethics of return,
> Like the night sound of coyotes on a hill
> Heard in eroded canyons of concern,
> Disposes what has happened, and what will.

Edgar Bowers' "The Astronomers of Mount Blanc" will illustrate the obvious possibility I have not yet mentioned, the combination of descriptive and figurative methods. Winters quotes the first stanza:

> Who are you that, from your icy tower,
> Explore the colder distances, the far
> Escape of your whole universe into night;
> That watch the moon's blue craters, shadowy crust,
> And blunted mountains mildly drift and glare,
> Ballooned in ghostly earnest on your sight;
> Who are you, and what hope persuades you trust?

The poem's second stanza answers, in abstract language, the question posed here, but, says Winters, "we are at no loss to understand the meaning of the imagery as we come to it. This is a perfect example of

the kind of imagery which I am trying to illustrate." He writes:

> Bowers moves into sensory perception at once, and the sensory perception and its significance are simultaneous. In the third line we have the appalling vision of the expanding universe disappearing into infinite space, and then the vision of absolute death in the image of the moon. The moon is the real basilisk; not the basilisk of archaic myth but the basilisk of the modern telescope or space-photograph; it is the basilisk in itself, cut off from everything pertaining to the warm variety of risk. It is the absolute vision. (Forms, 285)

Bowers' passage is descriptive in the way of "Le Cimetière Marin" and the last part of "Sunday Morning"; a scene (although not a natural one), more or less immediately observed, is the explicit focus. But we find within the passage two different approaches to post-Symbolism. Lines three, four, and five give us the poem's central detail; it is undoubtedly an image and does carry the conceptual significance Winters says it does. We need only to remark that it carries that significance as a symbol of absolute death, again, if not exactly in the medieval sense, certainly not in the Mallarméan sense, as Winters' interpretation makes clear. The opening lines prepare for this symbolism ("icy," "colder," "escape . . . to night"), but the last of these lines in itself is post-Symbolist, although in a different way. The sensory detail in lines one and two is metaphorical and primarily conceptual, its sensory potential limited by the nouns modified. At line three, however, something interesting happens. That the universe is expanding and disappearing into space is not something human sense, unaided, has determined, but a mathematical inevitability (we are told); it is unperceivable and unvisualizable, an idea only. Insofar as line three is more than a simple statement of an idea, it is essentially not descriptive but figurative. "Escape of your whole universe" refers to

both the expansion of the physical universe and, metaphorically, to neglect of the human world. But Winters is right to speak of an appalling vision: the sensory aspects of "icy" and "colder," though locally restrained, create a context that gives the third line an irresistible sensory charge. It is post-Symbolist figurative language.

3.

Concrete detail has no significance without a context that is to some degree abstract. My general aim has been to suggest that post-Symbolist imagery is not a new way of making sensory detail signify, but usually involves the use of two of the intellectual contexts I mentioned in my first essay, symbol and figure, often prepared for by a larger context of abstract argument. Symbol and figure are the immediate contexts of the post-Symbolist image and argument only preparatory because in symbolism and figurative speech, sensory detail and its significance appear more or less together; in argument they normally do not. But there is something more involved, a criterion of post-Symbolist imagery that has been involved in everything I have said: these contexts can carry meaning implicity. Here is one final account by Winters of post-Symbolist imagery, from the essay, "Problems for the Modern Critic of Literature" (1956):

> The image is different in kind, however, from almost anything one will find in the Renaissance, whether French or English. In Ben Jonson, for example, the language is almost purely abstract; in George Herbert and many others sensory details are named or implied, but not to be seen or heard; where we

> get a sensory image which is intended to affect our senses as well as our intellects . . . we ordinarily get an explicit or fully developed simile or metaphor. But in Valéry we get something else, at least as a rule: we get the sharp sensory detail contained in a poem or passage of such a nature that the detail is charged with meaning without our being told of the meaning explicity, or is described in language indicating such meaning indirectly but clearly.[6]

This is one of the earliest statements of the method--the name had not yet been coined-- but it offers directly the criterion of inexplicitness that is implied in the comments on "Church Monuments" and "Hymn to Diana" in Forms.

Symbolic writing, although there may be seeding with conceptually relevant words, is by definition inexplicit, whether imagistic or not. The problem this sometimes poses is hardly peculiar to post-Symbolism, although it is particularly common in poetry after Mallarmé: it is the perpetual problem of autonomous significance in art. Will the meaning of a work reveal itself to a reasonable number of perusals by an intelligent reader, or is foreknowledge of the writer's concerns necessary? We need only note that post-Symbolist implicitness tends to assume as an audience those, like poets and scholars, who will read widely in a poet's work, not casual readers of anthologies. The problems posed by the criterion of inexplicitness for post-Symbolist poetry that is not symbolic, however, are more varied and more peculiar to the style. I will conclude by considering several passages and poems that are imagistic but, because of the nature of their rhetoric, tell us their meaning more explicitly than symbols typically do.

Stevens' great poem "The Course of a Particular" is predominately abstract commentary on a scene offered in the first stanza, but conceptual significance is established even in the scene.

> Today the leaves cry, hanging on branches swept by wind,
> Yet the nothingness of winter becomes a little less.
> It is still full of icy shades and shapen snow.[7]

The passage can be roughly paraphrased as follows: the day seems bleak, but at least the frigid, non-human otherness of nature is mitigated somewhat by the human projections of the perceiver. The image in the third line carries conceptual import in the words "shades" (the projection of ghosts onto the landscape) and "shapen" (the imagination as artificer). It is post-Symbolist imagery; "shades" and "shapen" have meanings besides their purely descriptive ones. But the double-meanings do not work towards the creation of a symbol; the snow may be symbolic of nothingness here, but that is not the main conceptual thrust of the phrase in question. Nor is the phrase metaphorical; it is word-play of a sort, but more explicit than metaphor. We cannot assume, then, that symbol and figure are the only possible vehicles for simultaneity of perception and conception; there are other kinds and degrees of inexplicitness.

My second example is from Winters' "To the Holy Spirit (from a deserted graveyard in the Salinas valley)":

> Low in the summer heat
> Naming old graves, are stones
> Pushed here and there, the seat
> Of nothing, and the bones
> Beneath are similar:
> Relics of lonely men,
> Brutal and aimless, then,
> As now, irregular.

Rhetorically, the passage gives us a tandem figure: stones like bones (analogy) like lives (simile); the colon after "similar" implies that the "Relics" refers to both bones and gravestones. One might argue that "irregular" here is post-Symbolist imagery in the way of "isolation,"

"casual," and "ambiguous" in "Sunday Morning," but in reverse. Those words function primarily as description, but have been charged by their context with meaning; "irregular" is primarily conceptual but, the argument might go, has been charged with descriptive value by the sensory detail preceding. But the word does not invite us to project a sensory construction; the description is not powerfully enough established at first, and it is seriously (perhaps deliberately) weakened by the explicitness of the intermediary analogy ("similar").

Explicitness of figure, then, can indeed work against a post-Symbolist level of sensory force. A recent poem by Thomas D'Evelyn seems further to bear this out, in an interesting way:

Crystal

In February rain
The snowy fields turn dirty,
Once white as the champagne
You sipped when you were thirty.

The skies, once firm as flint,
Are broken now and cherty.
In the half-light I squint
To think you once were thirty.

You were a snow-flake: cold
But delicately flirty,
Too nice, indeed to hold
For long, when you were thirty.

Dearest demimondaine!
Your snow still bears the print
A wolf left in the bold
Soft waste when you were thirty.[8]

The poem establishes a series of relations between an aging woman of the speaker's close acquaintance and the aging winter, a method not uncommon in the Renaissance. Stanzas three and four give us sensorily unvitalized metaphors, in the Renaissance manner. The first two stanzas, however, seem to involve an immediate natural setting and so

seem to be closer to descriptive poetry. The first consists of an image and an associational transition by the way of simile (itself purely in the service of description; both terms are concrete) to the theme of aging. The context makes lines one and two symbolic; it charges unexplicit imagery with thematic import. Similarly in the second stanza we have no explicit figures or explanation, but an associative connection between scene and theme ("half-light" to "squint" to looking across a great distance) and the same charging of imagistic, unexplained opening lines. But these surely do not feel like even post-Romantic details. Probably part of this impression is due to the speaker's cavalier attitude to his subject, but its main source is the fact that the images are so obviously not a part of his real concern. Rhetorically, they are symbols, but we seem to be in the presence of a witty, figurative sensibility, rather than an imagistic one. The stanzas feel like exercises in yoking disparates. The presence of words so close to explicit relevance on the conceptual level as "once white," "turn dirty," "firm," "broken," "squint" (like "print," "wolf," "bold," and "soft" in stanza four) over-intellectualizes the scene, deprives the imagery of significant, autonomous force. The meaning does not seem to be fused with the imagery; it seems to reside in the relationship between a tenor and a vehicle, although we really have neither.

Our terminology is equally taxed by the opposite sort of rhetorical-semantic tension, where explicit figures begin to work like symbols. An example is Stevens' "The Death of a Soldier," a more serious and much greater poem that D'Evelyn's, which makes fuller and more integrative use of both figurative language and description.

Life contracts and death is expected,
As in a season of autumn.
The soldier falls.

He does not become a three-days personage,
Imposing his separation,
Calling for pomp.

Death is absolute and without memorial,
As in a season of autumn,
When the wind stops,

When the wind stops and, over the heavens,
The clouds go, nevertheless,
In their direction.[9]

Except that the analogue precedes the literal term (so that the unadorned fact gets the last-place emphasis), the first stanza is a conventional, non-imagistic simile; more explicit, in fact, than most similes, since the grounds of comparison are spelled-out in line one. The language is plain, but the stanza is packed with meaning: the soldier dies gradually --not spectacularly, but after life has contracted-- and as if inevitably (the indefinite article registers causualness and mundanity); but his death is a radical and irrevocable change, a nuance got by "falls" in the seemingly contradicting context of "is expected" (another effect allowed by the reversed simile). The faintly scoffing tone of the allusion to Christ in the second stanza is achieved by a slight elevation of diction, with "personage" and "pomp," against the plain norm. The allusion to a being whose absence <u>is</u> said to make certain demands on others and to be reason for ceremony, universalizes the soldier, as the being whose death, by contrast, is not special; and this is confirmd by the now generalized statement opening the third stanza. Stanzas three and four restate the simile in a way that combines and generalizes the central ideas of stanza one ("absolute") and two ("without memorial"), both ideas now invested with

deeper significance by the allusion to and implicit denial of the Christian "gift" of everlasting life in a world beyond this one ("heavens"), a gift administered by a power more absolute than death. On the descriptive level, the second simile intensifies to imagery "a season of autumn" by isolating one of autumn's moments, an extrarodinary perception, yet readily recognizable as part of our world. The vividness is largely due to the disposition of the perception across the break between stanzas three and four. The short line, "When the wind stops" (the poem's consistent end-stopping makes us really feel as such the dwindling line lengths of each stanza); the break, then the line taken up again and continued, gives the effect of a chilling silence, a sudden absence in this world, to which, however, the heavens remain indifferent.

The ultimate effect of the expansion of the concrete term of the original simile is to give that term a life of its own, and thus, as in the poems by Hardy and Cunningham, to make the poem not only thoughtful but movingly personal. Moreover, the image partakes fully of the wonder and inscrutability of the physical world, and the fact, with the quiet nobility of the language throughout, invests even random death with a strange dignity that is not in the first simile, nor in the literal term of the second. The meaning seems to emerge not in a relationship between terms of a simile, but from the image itself; it feels like a symbol. Post-Symbolism is achieved here, it appears, in part by resisting the mutually restricting effect of the terms of the ordinary simile, and thus its explicitness. This sort of resistance is common in the Imagists (Williams' "To Awaken an Old Lady") and in the

Symbolists,10 but there the method is not subordinated to thought. Steven's poem seems to me a clear example of "post-Symbolist imagery with the rational structure of the Renaissance."

My final example is Stevens' "The Snow Man," a single sentence that means exactly what it says:

> One must have a mind of winter
> To regard the frost and the boughs
> Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;
>
> And have been cold a long time
> To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
> The spruces rough in the distant glitter
>
> Of the January sun; and not to think
> Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
> In the sound of a few leaves,
>
> Which is the sound of the land
> Full of the same wind
> That is blowing in the same bare place
>
> For the listener, who listens in the snow,
> And, nothing, himself, beholds
> Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

Like "The Death of a Soldier" and indeed almost all of Stevens' better poems, "The Snow Man" works by placing sharp detail in a clear context of ideas; the ideas invest the details with significance, the detail provides a sense of fresh and personal response to the ideas. Generally, in Stevens, those ideas are statements of one of two positions on the problem of "agreement with reality": that one must see nature in human terms, project onto it, identify with it; or, that one must not do so, but rather try to see "the very thing and nothing else." The clues to this concern on "The Snow Man" are the abstractions "mind," "to think/ Of any misery in the sound," and "nothing." To paraphrase the position taken is virtually to repeat the poem: one has to have a

cold, clear mind to see things as they are and not regret their irremediable otherness.[11]

This rational content indeed makes the imagery significant, but the explicitness of the statement would seem to work against the imagery's carrying conceptual significance of its own. The striking visual image of the trees in stanzas one and two, moreover, is separated from the more abstract core of the poem's argument (stanzas four and five) by the shift to the weaker, aural perception in stanza three. To see that the imagery does, nonetheless, carry crucial conceptual weight, one has to see that it does not, as it may seem to, work either as a symbol of the cold mind later described or as a development of the figure, "mind of winter." The imagery does not convey the speaker's coldness, but nature's; if anything, it might be said to symbolize nature's distant otherness. But more importantly, it does not carry only or even primarily coldness at all, but brilliance and a sense of wonder. It conveys the speaker's emotional attachment to the scene, not his detachment from it; detachment is registered only later, in the explicit statement of stanzas four and five and in the details of diction ("a few leaves," the repetition of "same," "bare place," "snow," and the repetition of "nothing"). The tone of the imagery, on the contrary, works to suggest the value of what is being intellectually rejected. The description of the trees justifies the regret expressed in the later lines. In brief, the attitude of "The Snow Man" is clear, yet full and complex, and the fullness and complexity are made possible by the thematic force of the imagery.

That this essay has found strict application of certain of Winters' criteria of post-Symbolist imagery problematic hardly calls into question the value of an approach to the history of style that allows us to see clearly the meaningful, positive way in which poems like "The Snow Man" are modern: they display the effects of the romantic-experimental concentration on descriptive detail and insistence on the uniqueness and complexity of individual perception, while re-establishing contact with the tradition of moral intelligence; the intelligence is brought to bear on the problems of sharp and unique perception of the world. And surely this is the great part of what Winters means by post-Symbolism. It may be that the broadest definition --simply the use of sharp imagery within a rationally significant context, giving "the impression of a more of less continuous texture"-- is the one that will finally be most useful. The matter is not to be resolved here; the next step must be a careful study of the imagery of the important experimental poets: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Stevens, Valéry, the later Eliot, Winters. Such a project runs little risk of failure, for the questions Winters raises cannot but take us deeply and responsibly into the styles of our time.

CHAPTER IV STYLE AND NATURE: VARIATIONS ON A ROMANTIC THEME

> Technique, then, is not merely a means of recording perception but is actually a means to discovery, a projection, a refinement, an intensification of the spirit, created by the spirit to make its boundaries more precisely, to extend them a little farther, to differentiate itself a little more distinctly from the remainder of the universe, from "nature," from that which will eventually absorb it and which is continually endeavoring to absorb and destroy it.
>
> —Winters
> "The Extension and Reintegration of the Human Spirit"

I have discussed Winters' remark that "the imagery [of post-Symbolism] is not ornament, as it would be in the Renaissance"; that sentence continues: "nor is it merely pasturage for revery as in much of the poetry of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries." For the moment I am not interested in the charge itself so much as its relationship to the one preceding it; if things are not right with romantic imagery, it is not that it is ornamental; it could hardly be so, since it is the very subject of the poetry, or at least the starting point for meditation. The imagery of such poetry is often "a part of the universe the poet is trying to understand," like Stevens' pigeons but not Shakespeare's lark, because that universe poses him questions about the ultimate meaning of the physical world and its relationship to the soul that it did not pose Renaissance Christians.

The concerns in the poems by Stevens I have discussed are unmistakeably post-Romantic. And a profound development in theme affects style, no less than the reverse; the universal and conceptual, the "true," have come to be thought inextricable from the phenomenological in Stevens' age in a way they were not in Shakespeare's. "Poetry," Stevens writes, "has to be something more than a conception of the mind. It has to be a revelation of nature. Conceptions are artificial. Perceptions are essential."[1] Hence the modern poet distrusts allegory and, as we have seen, figurative language that is merely (in T. E. Hulme's phrase) a "gliding through an abstract process," not sensorily immediate or suggestive.

In this essay I want to consider some of the issues raised by Winters' theory in a less exclusive context than I have. I want to consider them here as they come up in ordinary analyses of poems, in this case, several treatments of a distinctly post-Renaissance theme loosely describeable as the theme of communion with nature. The theme has the advantage of bearing quite directly on style, insofar as convincing confrontation with nature entails, in one way or another, the use of sensory detail. The theme seems to have the disadvantage, especially for the writers with whom it is most commonly associated, such as Wordsworth, Emerson, and Roethke, of encouraging in the style the ambiguity inherent in the subject. In the interests of clarity and economy I will not treat these writers, who have been often enough discussed in connection with the theme. I will take up one poem each by Henry Vaughan, Keats, and Leconte de Lisle, and conclude with a more extensive account of the theme in Winters' own verse.

1.

Henry Vaughan's "The Water-fall"[2] is a late seventeenth-century poem that seems to move in the direction of our theme but that we will not, finally, for important reasons, want to call Romantic. The poem ought to interest the historian of ideas because it seems to be attempting to resolve a conflict between two views of the soul. There is the Renaissance view of Ben Jonson's that

> Knowledge is the action of the soul and is perfect without the senses, as having the seeds of all science and virtue within itself; but not without the service of the senses: by those organs the soul works: she is a perpetual agent, prompt and subtle; but often flexible and erring; entangling herself like a silkworm: but her reason is a weapon with two edges, and cuts through. In her indagations ofttimes new scents put her by; and she takes errors into her, by the same conduits she doth truths.[3]

And there is the view of the post-Lockeian poet,

> Well pleased to recognize
> In nature and the language of the sense
> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
> The guide, the guardian of my heart and soul
> Of all my moral being.[4]

Jonson's soul has a being of its own: it is a perpetual agent that cuts through confusions that new scents sometimes bring. Wordsworth has a "heart," but nature and the language of the sense are the guardians, the active principles; new scents <u>are</u>, in effect, the "soul" of his moral being. The interest for the historian of poetic style here is that with these epistemological notions go different kinds of poetry: on one hand, an interest in theology and ethics, expressed in rational discourse of low sensory content, where the images that do occur are primarily

vehicles for ideas about something else or are in some way subordinated to such ideas; and on the other hand, an interest in the relations of nature and individual perception, expressed in intellectually looser, "organic" (that is, unique, since inherent in the matter, as opposed to public, since imposed by conventions external to the poem) structures of high sensory content, where images function as both setting and subject.

The situation of Vaughan's poem --the poet addressing a stream-- is not enough to connect it with this latter sort of poetry; nature personified as a mythological figure or as one of her parts --moon, sun, season, tree, sea-- is not uncommonly addressed in Renaissance verse. What is new, and what reminds us so much of Wordsworth, is the tone of quiet intensity that characterizes the address to nature, and the religious diction. These are brought incidentally to nature in "The Water-fall," of course, by the real, religious problem on the speaker's mind; but until the final four lines the vehicle and tenor of the poem are run rather closely together, so that we have the feeling, at least, of a serious and sincere ("dear bank") contemplation of nature, immediately observed, as the seat of deep meaning. We can recognize, of course, that by calling the stream his "sacred wash and cleanser here" the speaker means to invoke Holy Baptism and we see that the "here" implies a "there" that is really home; but then we have become used to poets using Christian notions to invest non-Christian subjects with significance (see Stevens' "Sunday Morning" and Baulelaire *passim*). In places it is hard not to think that Vaughan himself was becoming uncertain of the distinction between the Christian *god* and the pantheistic one. Even to think of hearing "deep murmurs through time's silent

stealth" or to think of the eye as "pensive" requires a sensibility radically closer to Wordsworth's than Jonson's ever got. There is an urgency in "What sublime truths and wholesome themes/ Lodge in thy mystical deep streams!" that seems hard to square with the notion of the stream as merely a stimulus to metaphor. And even the poem's conclusion, which shows the speaker triumphantly getting clear in his mind the distinction between God and God's creation, seems evidence of a powerful temptation to merge the two.

To interpret the poem's last stanza in this way is to read "this" in the final line as "this river upon whose bank I am sitting." This is plausible enough, in the context of the apparently romantic elements I have mentioned, and it accords with the methods of Vaughan's greater poem, "The Lamp," where the poet establishes a comparison between a lighted oil lamp and the religious life of man but concludes the poem, turning from the earth to heaven, by explicitly pulling away from the comparison. But the interpretation probably takes too much account of Vaughan's place as a precursor of Wordsworth and not enough of his place at the end of a Renaissance tradition, not precisely the tradition of Jonson, but one resting on the same view of the soul: that of Donne, and I refer primarily to Donne's obsessive wit.

> O my invisible estate
> My glorious liberty, still late!
> Thou art the Channel my soul seeks,
> Not this with Cataracts and Creeks.

No doubt the stream in the poem does have real cataracts and creeks; but since "my invisible estate" is heaven (the line preceding, which brings on the exclamation, and "glorious liberty" make it plain), "this with cataracts and creeks" is more likely figurative for the struggle of earthly moral life, and not the pull of pantheistic nature at all. This

seems probable in the poem about making metaphorical correspondences; and perhaps most importantly, there is no realization of cataracts, creeks, or waterfall. These do not seem really to have a sensory existence for Vaughan; they are sensory details in the figure, but not images.

To see that the poem is in no sense a failure on this account, that the sensory detail does not aspire to imagery, one has to see the importance of "Ling'ring" line six (one is helped to do so by the unique emphasis given the word by metrical inversion, line break, and strong, comma-enforced caesura following). The twelve-line stanza that opens the poem contains as much sensory detail as the remaining twenty-eight lines combined:

> With what deep murmurs through times silent stealth
> Doth thy transparent, cool, and watry wealth
> Here flowing fall,
> And chide, and call,
> As if his liquid, loose Retinue stayed
> Ling'ring, and were of this steep place afraid,
> The common pass
> Where, clear as glass,
> All must descend--
> Not to an end,
> But quickned by this deep and rocky grave,
> Rise to a longer course more bright and brave.

But the detail is almost entirely subordinated to the idea of lingering in the face of death. Perhaps the aural detail approaches post-Symbolist imagery: the "deep murmurs" and especially, because the shortened lines enact the sound, the "chide and call" of the falling water carry the idea of scolding the lingerers and something of the actual physicality of the water. "Time's silent stealth," "the common pass," the "deep and rocky grave" give us death, as does "this steep place" which, although (like "chide and call") barely realized, does

catch with the consecutive stresses the idea of absolute separation, a falling off. "Transparent . . . wealth" and "clear as glass" give us the unbodied soul at death; "his liquid, loose retinue" God's unstable, straying flock; "quickned" and "a longer course more bright and brave (although "Brave" is partly descriptive: the Shorter OED offers "splendid, showy, handsome") life in heaven after death.

The few sensory details in the rest of the poem can likewise be analyzed conceptually; there are no images (the oddness of "restagnates" deprives the figure of the streaming rings of whatever sensory force was potential in it). The structure of the remaining lines, however, is what places the poem most clearly in the line of Donne, as the briefest comparsion of "The Water-fall" to certain other late seventeenth century meditations on nature, by Milton ("L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso") for instance, or Denham ("Cooper's Hill": "My fixed thoughts my wandering eye betrays"), will show. These poems proceed from detail to detail by association, and are held together primarily by mood rather than intellectual movement. Their form is "found" in the things they describe: one sees in them nature becoming the anchor of the purest thoughts, the guardian of the heart, the soul of moral being. But in Vaughan the soul is still a perpetual agent, and subtle; the rest of his poem consists in witty, excursive variations on the idea of lingering established in the first stanza. Lines fifteen to eighteen compare evaporation to death as a return to the creator; lines nineteen to twenty-two compare rain and reincarnation; lines twenty-three to twenty-six play on the idea that it is odd to speak of death for the element that is the first step to eternal life; lines twenty-seven to thirty-two play on "lodge" (the very idea that truth about death can be

found in nature, without a mind led by the Holy Spirit); lines thirty-two to thirty-six compare the dispersion of circular waves to death; and the sixth and final excursion compare the "glorious liberty" of heaven with earthly life, with its cataracts and creeks. And this context of figurative variations on lingering provides one final piece of evidence for the figurative interpretation of the poem's last line (and suggests why it is properly placed): lingering in the face of death is one of the most-dangerous of earthly life's cataracts; it is a creek that leads off the main stream.

"The Water-fall" is not a great poem: the mode of metaphorical excursion is not the most rigorous; it will not handle careful, developing thought, and it tends to lead away from consistent seriousness into local cleverness. And there are problems of logic (heaven is a "course" and a "channel," but where does it lead?). These are problems of an essentially conceptual method, not an imagistic one; the problems in the next poem I will consider, Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale,"[5] are different, and the difference marks the extent to which Wordsworth's view of things and its attendant acceptance of imagery for its own sake replaced Jonson's over the course of the eighteenth century. The poem shows the limiting effect of this on the rational side of being, both in the quality of thematic development and in the increasingly related matter of the kind of theme thought worthy of treatment.

The ode is sometimes read as a poem about immortality, but such a reading makes most of it more obscure than it already is. In fact, the poem is on the more curious and distinctly Romantic notion of the poet's capacity to achieve self-annihilation through empathic identification

with his subject. The great poet can accomplish this, Keats wrote, because he "is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason".[6] In poetic practice this involves a cultivated spontaneity (reflection would bring one back into touch with one's own ego) and a rambling inclusiveness of vision. In "Ode to a Nightingale" we get not only the subject of self-annihilation by empathy, but the method of cultivated spontaneity and inclusiveness.

The poem offers itself as a kind of inspired trance, a dramatic (in the sense that it arrives finally at a conclusion which could have been stated at the outset and then taken up) meditation that shows us as part of its thematic intention a mind more or less freely associating. The meditation moves by one thing suggesting another connected with it in the speaker's mind. This randomness has led the poem's defenders to unusual notions of structure. F. R. Leavis finds that "the strength of the Ode . . . is far from merely being the strength of details":

> The rich local concreteness is the local manifestation of an inclusive sureness of grasp in the whole. What the detail exhibits is not merely an extraordinary intensity of realization, but also an extraordinary rightness and delicacy of touch; a sureness of touch that is the working of a fine organzation. The Ode, that is, has the structure of a fine and complex organism . . . the Ode is, in fact, an extremely subtle and varied interplay of motions, directed now positively, now negatively.[7]

The coincidence of "organization" with "inclusiveness," "organism," and "interplay of motions" is immediately suspicious. By "interplay of motions" Leavis means the alternation of images connoting life and those connoting death or dissolution: "rich to die," he says, is "a phrase that epitomizes the poem." The poem's "delicacy of touch," to which Leavis is undeniably sensitive, may be in support of this sort of

alternation, but it is an oddly Aesthetic and Romantic appreciation of structure that emphasizes the shifts in mood themselves, somehow internally motivated (as in a living "organism"), rather than the shifts in argument that ought to motivate the shifts in mood, as the principle to which sensory detail should be subordinated.

Even supposing one were to accept this approach to structure, there are at least two reasons why Leavis' formulation would still be misleading. First, Keats' detail is so much more rich and suggestive (and this is not to say "local" and "concrete") than Vaughan's that it actually governs the shifts of the poem. It is more proper to speak of the mood "structure" as an accident of detail than of detail as merely the "local manifestation" of the structure; the transitions of the poem insist on this. The imagery is quite deliberately "pasturage for revery." Second, the mood structure could not <u>be</u> the only one, since the ode is not a piece of music but a poem made of statements; it does have an argument, or at least the outline of one. We have a desire for self-annihilation expressed in stanza one, the reason for the desire in stanza three, three possible means of achievement considered, and finally a rejection of the original desire. The development within and between these parts may be associative, but there is this overall plan and it is rationally apprehensible. It marks the inevitable element of deliberateness by which spontaneity, if it is to work in the service of meaning at all, must be controlled. Still, it is a very bare framework; and it would be wrong to say that it really controls the poem's details to the extent that the idea of lingering in the face of death controls the details of "The Water-fall." There <u>is</u> paraphraseable thematic development, but the proportion of each stanza devoted to it is small;

much of the poem, and most of the sensory detail, is empathic digression.

The poem opens, appropriately enough, with an account of the speaker's condition in which the physical and the emotional are nearly fused. Since it is rather odd to feel both pain and drowsy numbness, we get two similes to clarify things, but these, despite the famous sound effects of lines one through four, do not sharpen the sensation but make it more vague by piling up exotic and emotionally loaded (and thus, in the absence of a conceptual context, distracting) things that the speaker is reminded of by the feeling: "hemlock," "Lethe," "opiate." This is typical of the poem's imagery, which is rarely in fact "concrete" or "localized." The feeling is then attributed to the speaker's compassionate identification with the bird: "too happy in thine happiness," which happiness is then described. That the shadows are "numberless," that is, non-human, has conceptual import, but apart from this the description shows us the non-restrictive empathy at work.

Only in the final two lines of stanza two does it become apparent why being too happy in the bird's happiness is cause for heart-ache: the dissolution of the speaker's own identity is not complete; he remains, metaphorically, where he is. The subject of wine is suggested, if we are to judge by the procedure elsewhere in the poem, by "full-throated" in the final line of the previous stanza, but its thematic connection to "fading away" is clear. The problem here is that the two concluding lines I mention are the only lines in the stanza that do develop the argument. The wine passage is a charming illustration of the connection between the theory of Negative Capability and the method of exuberant associationism; but it is on wine, not fading away, and so is a digression.

Stanza three offers the alternative to oblivion: life in the world of time and thought. In effect, this suggestion of motive for dissolution belies the poem's fifth line, "'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot," for the speaker's sympathetic sortie into the world of men reveals considerable dissatisfaction with his own lot; but then, Keats' aim is inclusiveness, not consistency. Anyway the morbidity is so thoughtlessly excessive that it is hard not to believe the speaker relishes the act of imaginative projection more than he dreads its content. In stanza four he decides not to "fade away into the forest dim," with Bacchus, but to fly on the wings of poetry. Keats is playing on the conventional notion of poetry as a flight of fancy, but he is serious, as were other Romantics, in regarding it as a method of temporarily merging with nature, as a liberation from the effect of one's own "dull brain." At line thirty-five ("Already with thee!") it occurs to the speaker that he has been writing the poetry of empathic identification for some time already; he reflects that the warm, moon-lit, starry evening is good for poetry, but that the darkness of the forest may be a problem. A lamp served Vaughan as well as a waterfall, since he was interested in the objects of the world only as vehicles for speaking about concepts, but Keats' interest is in nature itself, and so it is better that it be available to all his senses. Fortunately his speaker can guess the particulars of his surroundings by their perfume.

The speaker is listening, at the beginning of stanza six, for the flies he knows haunt the musk rose. Whether it is the thought that smelling and listening are finally not enough for poetry to transport, or simply the association of "haunt," "summer," and "eves," the speaker

is brought to the third and final method of dissolution, death. He remembers that he has considered death before, and thinks it might be quite pleasant to die now, with the nightingale singing. In the stanza's final two lines, however, it occurs to the speaker that he would not be able to hear the nightingale, were he dead. Since the realization is so abrupt as to be comical and so quickly forgotten by the speaker, it is impossible to believe that the implied comment on the associational method is deliberate; the irony is accidental. (It would be better here not to take the poem's speaker to be the ailing man, John Keats.) The subject of death brings up the matter of the nightingales's death, which the speaker denies will happen, presumably now intending the bird only as a symbol for its song (after all, the speaker cannot see the bird itself), and the particular song he hears, in turn, as a symbol for beauty. This allows the speaker to indulge in his favorite passtime: he puts himself in the place of people throughout time as they might have heard the song. In stanza eight the speaker's own identity is revived and he realizes, in the first four lines, that the fancy is too weak for complete and lasting immersion in the external to be possible. The nightingale flies off in the next four lines, the speaker's fancy, however, still following the song over the countryside.

Probably "resolution" is too strong a word for the poem's conclusion, not because of the ambiguous questions of the final two lines (one <u>might</u> seriously ponder the status of the consciousness in empathic identification), but because of the nature of the connection between all that has preceded and this concluding stanza. Critics make claims for the poem's seriousness on the strength of this final turn:

> This is the honesty and this the moral discovery of the poem, he is tempted to escape from the busy painful world by the ineffable "requiem" of the nightingale, but he wryly recognizes that he has been trying to hynotize himself and abandons the fancy.[8]

This wants to make the poem even more dramatic than it is; in fact, the speaker has known all along that he has been trying to hypnotize himself, and most of the poem is his effort to do so. The "recognition," such as it is, evinces no real understanding and no moral adjustment. The tolling back to his true self by the mere mention of the word "forlorn" and indeed the psychological instability of the entire poem make any "moral discovery" (which ought anyway to be the very core of the poem) impossible to take seriously. Keats suceeds so well in making the poem appear a series of accidents that the final return to reality seems like one more; real closure in such a poem is impossible. One is left with the speaker's considerable emotional attachment to something he says he cannot believe, but there is insufficient reason on the side of disbelief to speak of anything like a complexity of attitude, as one can, for instance, in Stevens' "The Snow Man." One is not left admiring the speaker's "wry" honesty in rejecting fancy —he does not reject it; one wants to wish him a longer flight next time.

We are, in sum, a long way from Vaughan here. The earthly world <u>is</u> the channel that Keats' soul seeks; in spite of the ostensible motive in stanza three, it is sensuousness for its own sake that motivates the poem, "Beauty obliterates all consideration." The sensory detail exists in and for itself; its suggestiveness is scarcely controlled by a conceptual framework. Thus unsubordinated, the detail is distracting and the poem digressive. If Racine marks (as he is said to in Odette de

Mourgues' book) "The Triumph of Relevance," Keats' ode marks the triumph of irrelevance, or at least expansion of the notion of relevance to meaninglessness. It may be true that the work of art, as Coleridge says, is "rich in proportion to the variey of parts which it holds in unity," but the principle of unity, to be principle at all, must also be a principle of exclusion.

Henry Vaughan is known as a mystic, Keats as a poet with a healthy regard for the things of this world. But Keats' earthy world is not the world of moral cataracts and creeks: his style is better suited to blurring distinctions than to making them. Vaughan recognizes earthly existence as, if not one deliberately to linger in (or wish to), clearly the only one possible for the human being; his poem is an attempt to cope with the fact, and it involves no easy contemplation of ceasing on the midnight. Keats' speaker finally returns to the human world, but he banishes it for most of the poem; and his return is unimpressive.

2.

The partial defence of Romantic procedures implicit in Winters' remark, "if we are blind to the impressiveness and meanings of our physical surroundings, we are limited," does not stand for much on Keats' behalf: there is sensuous impressiveness in the Ode, but hardly the impressiveness of the real world--some imaginary Spenserian forest, rather. But there is, at least, a sense of wonder at the physical world that is not in Vaughan. One has to go to French verse, from roughly the

generation after Keats' death, to find the beginnings of an integration, but even there, Baudelaire sometimes excepted, one is still stuck with choosing between impressiveness and meaning. In Leconte de Lisle, however, there is occasionally a good deal of both.

De Lisle is best known as an aesthete and an antiquarian, the man who "turned the world to stone"[9] by fixing it, in the spirit of Gautier's "L'Art," hard, immobile, and remote from the flux of actuality. It is thus somewhat suprising to find Winters mentioning him in the following discussion of T. Sturge Moore:

> We are confronted here with a difficult distinction: that between suicide (perhaps, in a sense, within the limits of physical life) by way of surrender to sensation, emotion, or whim, including, it may be, surrender to drugs or alcohol, a surrender justified by romantic doctrine and practiced in varying ways and degrees by the romantics, a surrender which leads directly to madness; and, on the other hand, a mysticism which identifies death with surrender to divinity and which therefore finds death desirable. The latter is pagan and somewhat Parnassian . . . . Both kinds of surrender . . . draw man away from the full experience of life while that experience is available . . . . As to the first kind of surrender, it may occur in life or in literature or in both . . . . In literature it results in the destruction (as far as possible) of conceptual understanding, in an effort to reach pure connotation . . . . Moore seems to have been more or less aware of what I have discussed in this paragraph . . . . This awareness should have led him to the kind of poetry which I shall describe in my next essay as post-Symbolist . . . in fact, Leconte de Lisle on a few occasions went farther in this direction that did Moore. (Forms, 244-5)

Winters does not say whether de Lisle too was aware of a connection between surrender and connotation in literature, and he mentions no poems. There is no indication in de Lisle's writings that he was so aware, but there is at least one poem that does take up the subject of surrender to sensation in life, that does show a certain awareness (although not the one Winters suggests) of its relationship to style, and that seems to approach the condition of post-Symbolism. The poem is "Midi."[10]

"Midi" is a more thoughtful poem than Keats', and a less innocent one; it recognizes surrender to oblivous sensation as a temptation and a real danger in a way that the style of the Ode, devoid of both moral concern and real intensity of description, would not allow. The difference in thoughtfulness, as with Vaughan, can to a great extent be got at through the difference in structure. "Midi" is not a closely reasoned argument, but it displays a desire to understand the relation of sensory experience to human responses; it does not simply present them as inscrutably intertwined. Five stanzas of sensory detail give us an intensely realized, deliberately unhumanized natural setting, three stanzas give us an abstract, not only rational but logical (two "if-then" constructions) commentary on the scene. And there is another, although less rational, principle of structure: the poem moves nearer to life in each stanza: bodiless heat, field and distant forest, grain, grain in motion, cows, and finally man.

This kind of organization in a poem some thirty years farther along the route to Symbolist obscurity than Keats', should not really surprise, in view of the different French and English traditions. It is true that there is not abundance of serious thought in Parnassian verse, but this is because an extreme version of the doctrine of impersonality worked, and had to work deliberately, against it, not because French verse was becoming incapable of handling it. The Romantic revolution was a revolution of subject matter in both England and France. In France it also meant a loosening of metrical rules --though freedom of emjambment and of caesural strength and placement (both used to good effect in "Midi") may not seem much of a revolution to English readers-- and of restrictions on certain sorts of diction; but it was scarcely the

kind of attack on the intellect, on rational control of sensory detail and on the use of abstraction, that Keats represents. One finds the French Romantics writing insipid nature/love poems along the lines of "Le Lac," but also political and philosophical poems, which, although scarcely less insipid, are logical in structure, abstract in diction, and even epigrammatic. It may be that the higher pitch of French socio-political life at the time had something of a stabilizing effect on poetic form, kept in public --French literary culture never really decentralized or ruralized; its center remained Paris, the intellectual and cultural capital of Europe. Certainly the neo-classical efforts to formalize and restrict poetic language in the interest of clarté helped keep the French lyric doggedly rational. The French tradition did not thrive in the eighteenth century as the English did; Voltaire and Chénier will scarcely compare with Pope and Blake; but it was, however small a consolation at the time, a more rational tradition.

The sensory detail in "Midi," then, is not surprisingly governed by a traditional structure. But if we are to say that the poem's style represents a fuller awareness than that of Vaughan's poem, the sensory detail will have in itself to be at least as good as Keats'. It is, in fact a good deal sharper than Keats', and this is largely responsible for the greater seriousness with which we are obliged to take the theme of surrender in the poem. It is sharper partly because it is working in a very different way. Keats' detail relies for its sensuous appeal on accumulated suggestivenss, achieved by sound effects (occurring to the point of mannerism) and especially by diffuseness of reference. We almost get "non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit"; the thing itself is buried in impressionistic detail, rich in connotation.

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
    My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
    One minute past, and Lethe wards had sunk;
    * * *
O for a beaker of the warm South
    Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene
    * * *
    But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
    Through verduous glooms and winding mossy ways.
    * * *
The coming musk rose, full of dewy wine,
  The murmurous haunts of flies on summer eves.

The associations of "hemlock," "dull opiate," and "Lethe"; of "warm South" and "blushful Hippocrene"; of "heaven," "glooms," and "winding ways;" of "wine" and "haunt" enrich emotionally, but do not sharpen our perception of the ache, the wine, the moonlight through the trees, and the roses and flies.[11] Finally, we have less sensory perception than feeling, the cause of which is obscure. One can find this sort of thing in Tennyson and the later Victorians and Georgians (where, however, the feeling seems to be restricted to nostalgia), but it is pre-eminently the method of Mallarmé and the later Verlaine: "Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air,/ Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose . . . . rien que la nuance." This <u>is</u> the theory of what Winters calls "the effort to reach pure connotation;" but it is really the antithesis of the Parnassian way. There the object is viewed as if in brilliant light, not "verduous glooms;" it is fixed in space, and its boundaries defined so that it cannot be taken over willy-nilly by the reader's private associations. "Que ton vers soit la chose envolée," says Verlaine, but in de Lisle vividness is achieved not by expansion but by restriction. The language of the first five stanzas of "Midi" is intensely

denotative; virtually every detail points to its object directly, and nowhere else, and there is no wastage. Such lucidity shows the effect of the French classicist purification of reference (a purification the Symbolists sought to undermine), and may be partially determined by the nature of the language itself,[12] so it is rather difficult fully to account for it in "Midi"; but the comparison with Keats permits us to notice certain things. In the first place, we have an intense concentration on the immediate scene, that scene is a real one, and the details are those we would find there. There are no fairies, no Biblical or mythological allusions, no mention of faraway lands, no list of plants possibly growing in the neighborhood. We are not obliged to follow the poet's mind as it chases up the connotations of its own imagery; rather, we get an orderly and detailed inspection of the scene. There is something dreamlike about de Lisle'e scene too (as there is about many Parnassian scenes), but it is not associational shifts of focus. It is, in fact, that the scene, even the heat itself in stanza one, is fixed as in stone, as per Gautier's advice:

> Sculpte, lime, cisèle;
> Que ton rêve flottant
> Se scelle
> Dans le bloc résistant!

In the second place, the diction in the opening stanzas is simple and unpretentious. There are some striking figures of speech, but they avoid strange and loaded words; they are restrained by the descriptive context. The heat "tombe en nappes d'argent"; the earth is "en sa robe de feu"; the cornfields "épuisent sans peur la coupe du soleil"; "une ondulation" of the "mer dorée" "va mourir à l'horizon poudreux." These figures work by bringing together discordant qualities: scorching stillness and falling rain; exposure and covering; thirst and drink;

parched land and the sea. Much might have been made of these contrasts; but they are left to work unobtrusively, to make the description something more than a photograph or a statue. To the same end, the mitigation of stylistic inertness in the description of an inert scene, these stanzas describing a distinctly non-human nature are full of metaphors that depend upon human feelings: the air burns "sans haleine," "la terre est assoupie," the cornfields "épuisent"; the wave is "comme un soupir," the cows "suivent le songe intérieur." The occasional motion of the grain (not blown by the wind, but by an exhalation of its own burning center) to emphasize the stillness is the touch of a master of restraint.

But to say as much as I have is to offer the poem as an example, however remarkable, of a pseudo-objective style as severely limited in its human range as that of Keats. There are, however, ways in which the imagery of "Midi" pulls the poem in the direction of post-Symbolism, ways in which it is a step beyond Vaughan and Keats in the integration of the sensory and the conceptual. The poem, first of all, is not simply about surrender to sensation, as Winters (in the passage quoted earlier) seems to understand the experience; it combines that experience with an aspect of the other kind of surrender, the "mysticism which identifies death with surrender to divinity and which therefore finds death desirable." In "Midi," surrender to the oblivion of pure sensation, with its concomitant loss of identity ("Dans sa flamme implacable absorb-toi sans fin;" "ne sachant plus pardonner ou maudire") but without physical death ("retourne") <u>is</u> seen as a surrender to divinity: "le soleil te parle en paroles sublimes;" "le coeur <u>trempé</u> sept fois dans le néant <u>divin</u>." The divinity implied as resident in

nature is not the Wordsworthian divinity, which in "Tintern Abbey "has a moral aspect as well as a mystical; it is rather closer to Keats' god, Beauty that obliterates consideration. But the point is that de Lisle goes beyond Keats' purely egocentrical descriptiveness. The five sensory stanzas are studded with words that suggest the divinity and mysteriousness of nature: "roi des étés," "argent des hauteurs," "robe de feu," "ondulation majestueuse." More specifically religious are "la terre sacrée," "la coupe du soleil," and "soupir [expended spirit] de leur âme brûlante . . . va mourir a l'horizon." This last figure, picked up in the "suprême et mourne" of stanza seven, suggests that pure sensation is a kind of death, as does an image in stanza two that, suggesting in addition the boundary of human consciousness, surely is post-Symbolist: "La lointaine forêt dont la lisière est sombre." The entire implacable scene might be said to carry a conceptual value of its own, in view especially of "désabusé des larmes et du rire" and "ne sachant plus pardonner ou maudire" in stanza seven. midi, the sun's half-way point, is an apt symbol for the point of absolute neutrality and emptiness described in these lines, and the stifling immoblity of the scene enforces this at every turn.

Still, we cannot speak of anything like a "continuous texture" here. Our perception of the real significance of the imagery in these examples depends entirely upon the ideas set out in stanza six and following, where the poem seems to shake itself awake. These stanzas are in a different style than the others, a more thoughtful and a more human style, signalled by the heavily stressed opening, "Homme," which breaks the hypnotic spell of the description. It is the style of the best Baudelaire: the dense, abstract analysis of ennui; moral, but

tinged with the vocabulary of aesthetic mysticism ("Goûter une suprême et mourne volupté," "paroles sublimes," "le coeur trempé dans le néant divin"). The style of the commentary allows the poem to be self-conscious in a way that aesthetically purer poems, even such as those by de Lisle, Hérédia, Mallarmé and Régnier, whose imagery often connotes entrapment in and scepticism about their art (see, for instance, de Lisle's "La Vérandah"), can not be. Stanzas six and seven, in fact, give us a fair account of the aesthete's predicament (and here Mallarmé is compatible): the impersonal style is restricted in emotional range: "rien n'est triste ou joyeux"; there is only the "aesthetic emotion"; the style implies a retreat from the realities of "ce monde agité"; and it abdicates the responsibility of moral judgment, "pardonner ou maudire." The poem's conclusion is curiously indifferent to the adverse judgment implied by what precedes, curiously inhuman that is, but characteristically Parnassian. "La nature est vide et le soleil consume," but immersion in it need not "lead directly to madness" if one's chosen mode of perception has little human in it to risk. Such an experience, indeed, might well be one of the few real intensities available to such a bankrupt sensibility, perhaps the only respite from meaninglessness.

Now one might wish for one or two more Baudelairian stanzas to make certain things clear (how are the cities "infimes"? why "à pas lents"? how is one so altered by the experience that the poem can end as positively as it does?), but my point is that however essential the style of the descriptive stanzas is to the theme of the whole poem, the real thinking that is done is done quite apart from the imagery, in the final stanzas. It is there we get the implicit definition of humanness

as emotional engagement in a world of significances beyond the sensory, and the crucial distinction between the relation of pure sensation to full humanity and its quasi-religious relation to disillusioned spiritual neutrality. In short, the poem (line seven excepted) falls too easily into predicament and analysis to speak confidently of a post-Symbolist sensibility. The imagery is charged with a certain meaning by the abstract statement, but it does not come, even after many readings, to have the same intellectual force. In some poems, a certain "reading back" of commentary into a prior predicament is acceptable and even inevitable; after all, we read a poem only once in anything like a state of ignorance or virgin susceptibility to details, and subsequent readings are increasingly informed, accurate ones. But "Midi" actually insists in its style on a gulf between imagery and significance; the gulf is part of the thematic point. In de Lisle we have detail that is impressive in its own right, as we do not in Vaughan; and we have a rational mind in control, as we do not in Keats; but we do not quite have a fully unified style. I will now turn to Winters' own treatment of our theme, in which it seems to me we often do.

3.

Surely Shakespeare's sonnet LXXVII has never had a more sensitive reading than Winters' In Forms of Discovery:

> The imperceptible coming of wrinkles displays the physical invasion of the enemy, just as the imperceptible movement of the dial's shadow displays the constant movement of the enemy. In the ninth line, however, the enemy invades the mind, the center of being; it was the figure of the book which enabled

> the poet to extend the poem to this brilliant and terrifying suggestion, yet so far as the development of the theme is concerned, the extension occurs almost by the way, as if it were a casual and merely incidental feeling.
>
> Look! What thy memory cannot contain
> Commit to these waste blanks . . .
>
> This command, in isolation, is merely a command to make good use of the book, and the remainder of the passage deals wholly with the advantages of doing so; yet the command follows the lines in which we have observed the destruction of the physical being by time, and in this position it suggests the destruction of the mind itself. This terrifying subject, the loss of identity before the uncontrollable invasion of the impersonal, is no sooner suggested than it is dropped. (35)

"This terrifying subject" is Winters' obsession: the tenuous existence of the civilized human spirit, collective and individual, evolved from whatever origins, in a universe that is essentially material and primitive.

> Evening traffic homeward burns,
> Swift and even on the turns,
> Drifting weight in triple rows,
> Fixed relation and repose.
> This one edges out and by,
> Inch by inch with steady eye.
> But should error be increased,
> Mass and moment are released;
> Matter loosens, flooding blind,
> Levels drivers to its kind.
> ["Before Disaster" ll. 1-10]

But this universe, in its very materiality and primitiveness --infinitely various, implacable, eternal-- can also be magnificent and deeply mysterious, and so to the sensitive man, desirable.

> The spring has darkened with activity.
> The future gathers in vine, bush, and tree:
> Persimmon, walnut, loquat, fig, and grape,
> Degrees and kind of color, taste, and shape.
> These will advance in their due series, space
> The season like a tranquil dwelling-place.
> And yet excitement swells me, vein by vein:
> I long to crowd the little garden, gain
> Its sweetness in my hand and crust it small
> And taste it in a moment, time and all!
> ["Time and the Garden" ll. 1-10]

These attitudes towards the physical world, of terror, on one hand, and temptation, on the other, can be found throughout Winters' poems --"Before Disaster" is an early poem, "Time and the Garden" a late one-- and I shall recur to the significance of this. Nonetheless, the poetry and the criticism, taken as a whole, can be seen to reflect a certain general development with respect to the attitudes. Winters began as a poet at a time when there were "no ideas but in things." He adopted the intuitive, highly sensory, and somewhat solipsistic methods of Imagism:

> Red spring
> In deep valleys
>
> The peachtree
> Lies in shadow
> Deep as stone
>
> The river
> Is unheard.

Winters saw the attractiveness of such methods as ways of making the magnificence and mystery of sense experience a major part of one's awareness, and thus of one's being. He saw a "fusion" of consciousness with nature as desirable. At twenty-four he wrote of "the art of poetry":

> The degree of fusion of the parts of a poem will depend on the degree of fusion of the poet with his material, and that, to be sure, is the result of his sensitivity and his environment . . . . The cause of a perfectly fused poem is the fusion of the poet's consciousness with an object of whatever nature . . . A poem is . . . a stasis in a world of flux and indecision, a permanent gateway to waking oblivion, which is the only infinity and the only rest . . . . The poet, in creating, must lose himself in his object.[13]

Such a fusion, of course, is quite impossible, especially for a man like the poet, who is constantly making choices in a public realm beyond the object, the realm of language. Winters' use of "lose himself," however, is not tritely metaphorical; he believed that in intense perceptual

experience, if the faculties that constitute common sense (and thus a large part of our individual identites) be excluded, we become no more than the object of our attention, part of the non-human world.[14] From very early on Winters recognized the potential danger of this; the theme of many of the early poems (those, that is, that have ascertainable themes) is the privateness and arbitrariness of the poetic experience: a common emotion in these poems is helpless terror. In "The Longe Nightes When Every Creature...." the experience is terrible because the world with which one merges is pure change:

> I lie alone an eddy
> fixed, alive with
> change that is not I:
> slow torture
> this to lie and hold
> to mind against the stream
> with nought
> to seize on.

Paradoxically, the early poems occasionally see poetry as a way of stabilizing identity midst the chaos of sensory experience. In "Quod Tegit Omnia" (1925), the poet's identity, as he embodies experience in words, is "embedded in this crystalline/ precipitate of time." The poem also tells us, however, that it is the poet's business to confront new and undefined sense experience; so long as the poetic methods involved are those of pure perception, the process is circular, the solution a problem.

The consciousness wholly fused with the nature is deprived of a sense of the general human significance of its object, and thus of faculties that make complexity and variousness of theme possible in poetry (and sanity possible in life): reason and guided will. In 1928 Winters abandoned free verse for traditional forms that permitted greater distance and theoretical rigour; in 1929 he was more

confidently viewing poetry (in the passage that is the epigraph to this essay) as something that solidifies individual human being, that distinguishes it from, rather than dissolves it into, nature. Winters' reading of Greek and medieval philosophers led him to see romantic methods as misguided attempts to (in modern romantic jargon) "expand consciousness" without recourse to thought, indeed by supressing rationality and inviting immediate contact with the expansive and undefineable in life. It was the Greek and medieval program of definition and abstraction, he discovered, that really increased and refined Western consciousness. Attempted communion with nature was a step away from humanity.[15] "The Manzanita" symbolizes nature the placid, eternal, mysterious, and alive:

> Under the forest, where the day is dark
> And air is motionless throughout the day,
> Rooted in leaf-mould and in rotting bark,
> This old arbutus gathers strength to stay.

But:

> This life is not our life; nor for our wit
> The sweetness of these shades; these are alone.
> There is no wisdom here; seek not for it!
> This is the shadow of the vast madrone.

In retrospect, he writes in "A Summer Commentary" of his early days:

> When I way young, with sharper sense,
> The farthest insect cry I heard
> Could stay me; through the trees, intense.
> I watched the hunter and the bird.
>
> Where is the meaning that I found?
> Or was it but a state of mind,
> Some old penumbra of the ground,
> In which to be but not to find?

Much of the later poetry implies that, while fusion with nature may sometimes seem to be "the only infinity and the only rest," it is not a way of communing with what is really stable and eternal in the human

world. Sensory experience is, in fact, an index of time's gradual absorption of one's life; "The rain of matter on the sense", we read in a late poem, "Destroys my momently." Not the pure experience of nature, but tradition, the spirit of human intelligence, is the eternality man can engage with, although his perception of the spirit is tied to his physical, mortal nature. Winters writes, in "To the Holy Spirit," of the "Relics of lonely men" in a deserted graveyard:

> These are thy fallen sons
> Thou whom I try to reach.
> Thou whom the quick eye shuns,
> Thou dost elude my speech.
> Yet when I go from sense
> And trace thee down in thought,
> I meet thee, then, intense,
> And know thee as I ought.
> But thou art mind alone,
> And I, alas, am bound
> Pure mind to flesh and bone,
> And flesh and bone to ground.

His reading of sixteenth and seventeenth century English poets and his growing confidence in the stability of firm generalization in poetry --a confidence his prose never lacked-- led Winters to a version of the Renaissance plain style:

> A poem is what stands
> When imperceptive hands,
> Feeling, have gone astray.
> It is what one should say.
> Few minds will once to this.
> The poet's only bliss
> Is in cold certitude--
> Laurel, archaic, rude.
> ["The Teaching the Young" ll. 5-12]

But styles impose limitations on subject matter. The plain style allowed the treatment of themes --such as tradition-- other than romantic experience, but it was not an entirely satisfactory way of treating that experience, in which Winters was deeply interested.[16] After 1930, his criticism insists with increasing assurance on the dangers of

"unclassified sensation (a purely hypothetical infinity which, however, we can approach indefinitely)," or what Allen Tate calls "pure Quality" (see note 10, Ch.2); but the experience remained nonetheless an important part of his poetry, where life is often lived precisely (in Tate's phrase) "by maintaining the precarious balance upon the point of collapse into Quality." It may well be that Winters was in some sense a romantic at heart, but there is an important sense in which "romantic" is inadequate here. There is more to experience than "cold certitude," and this "more" might be thought of as the essential content of the intuitive romantic experience of nature; but it is also a part of life at its most serious, as it is lived in the great writers --with extreme sensitivity and integrity. In Winters, the romantic theme of communion with nature widens and deepens in its implications; it becomes the more centrally human problem of existential integrity: "the struggle," as he puts it in the "Notes" to his Poems (1940), "to adjust concept to experience and vice-versa, the imperfection of the result, the danger of the imperfection, the necessity of the effort." In Primitivism and Decadence he writes that "the immersion in sensation amounts to the dissolution of one's previous standards in order to obtain a fresh sensibility."[17] And this is his account of the symbolism of Moby Dick:

> The relationship of man to the known and to the half known, however, is not a simple and static one; he cannot merely stay on land, or he will perish of imperception, but must venture on the sea, without losing his relationship to the land; we have in brief, the relationship of principle to perception, or, in other words, the problem of judgment . . . . Symbolically, the passage [the invocation to the helmsman Bulkington] represents the process of living by judgment; that is, the perception of individual, shifting, and chaotic phenomena, but trained in principle, in abstraction, to the point where it is able to find its way amid the chaos of the particular.[18]

Now plain style poems might represent moments of felt-success in this "process," but Winters' temperment demanded a confrontation of sense experience in the poetry itself; as he wrote in 1929, "the sound work of art is not an abstraction from experience as is allegory but a concentration of experience."[19] The method that allowed Winters to treat the problems of romantic experience convincingly, yet with greater clarity and intelligence than any other writer in English, was post-Symbolism. I do not wish to argue that post-Symbolist methods impose no restrictions on subject matter --imagistic intensity works against both comedy and orthodox Christian non-worldliness, for instance-- but they do allow a large range of consciousness to be brought to bear on Winters' concerns, which, I have been trying to show, are far from eccentric or cultish. Nor do I mean to imply that the theoretical matters I have mentioned caused Winters to "deduce" the methods, quite the reverse, in fact; "Quod Tegit Omnia" prefigures both the concerns of the criticism and the style of the later verse, and the same holds for a number of early poems. But a knowledge of the ideas can help us appreciate what is going on in the poetry. I would like to conclude by considering two of Winters' best-known poems, which display not only the post-Symbolist methods, but some of the related ideas.

Both "Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight" and "The Slow Pacific Swell" deal with the immediate experience of nature and, symbolically, of undefined experience in general. In both poems the experience is something to be survived, a threat to human identity; but neither poem advocates any sort of rationalistic separation of mind from nature. Although the experience is clearly judged, it is significant, I think, that the poems are not primarily expository but narrative and

descriptive. Winters is concerned to give us not only thought about an experience, but a realization of the experience itself. The realization is much more evident in "The Slow Pacific Swell," but that it figures at all in "Sir Gawaine" is striking, for the experience described there is an impossible one; the poem is blatantly allegorical: the Green Knight and his lady represent undefined, supra-rational experience, with which the poet, Gawaine, must engage. Nonetheless, Winters' use of one of the great stories in the Western tradition --and his poem shows a profound awareness of that greatness-- is a stroke of distinctly modern genius.

The poem's opening stanzas recount, in essence, the initial events of the original, and even manage to capture something of the rich ambiquity (man? demon? vegetation god? life itself?); but Winters' selection of detail deliberately intensifies the sense of supra-rationality and non-humanness:

> Reptilian green the wrinkled throat,
> Green as a bough of yew the beard;

"Reptilian" connotes furtiveness, inscrutability, non-human cold-bloodedness, and evil. The word is but a modifier of a modifier, yet it carries the sensory charge of a noun, because "green" and "wrinkled" (which modify the foreshadowing "throat") inevitably pull back towards it. "Wrinkled" itself suggests great age; "green" and "bough," fecund nature; "yew" (in the Romantic tradition), death. Odder still, the real grammatical subjects of the lines, "throat" and "beard," remind us that the knight also resembles a living man. Similarly, in the second stanza the inhumanness of "head dropped clean" and "fixed his fingers in the hair" is juxtaposed with "rose and walked" and "unabashed and talked," and in the third, "cut down" and "grew" with "flesh." This

of course, is essentially the source of the puzzlement in the original too, but in Winters' poem it is so forced upon us that the knight, in his complex suggestiveness, indeed comes to represent life, but emphatically in its pre-significant aspect only, the natural world as opposed to the human; pure Quality. "Thought" and "understood" acquire thematic import by contrast. The reader's understanding of these matters has been fostered, to this point, entirely by sensory detail, the force of which, both intellectual and sensory, pervades the rest of the poem.

Stanza four depends for its significance on both our knowledge of the moral issue in the original poem and our recognition of the psychological theme introduced in the opening stanzas; it works to bring out the moral nature of that theme.

> And whether waking or in sleep.
> I lived in riot like a fool.

The latter line continues Winters' theme: "riot," in context, suggests the variety and chaotic uncontrollability of pure experience. What Gawaine must dare is to confront this "like a fool," in ignorance. But, although the fact that the living can be called riotous and foolish even in sleep makes it clear that we are not dealing with debauchery in the ordinary sense, Winters has no intention of emptying "riot" and "like a fool" of their moral content. He means to engage the reader in the same way that the original Gawaine poet does. We are led to feel that, under the circumstances, Gawaine is judging himself too severely, much harder than we would ourselves; but this is precisely the point: the poet (like the knight of the Round Table) is a man of extraordinary sensitivity and integrity. The nature symbolism in the description of

his temptation, stanzas five and seven, firmly fixes the poem as post-Romantic: the appeal of the riot in the original is entirely sexual. But the situation is the same; Gawaine's emotions are in danger of losing their bearings. The thematic significance of "unholy [yet] pure," and "shapes that I have never known" is clear.

Stanza six shifts into abstract analysis, vitalized by the lady's clinging and swarming. Winters' Gawaine understands not only what he must dare, but also what he risks, how he fares, and why, and with a lucidity quite beyond the capabilities of the narrator of the original, and many of its readers. The point of the passage is that in intense experience outside our immediate comprehension, active reason does not come into play; the sensitive man survives threats to his sense of who he is and where he stands by virtue of sound habits of feeling and manner. His perception is "trained in principle, in abstraction, to the point where he is able to find his way amid the chaos of the particular." It might be argued that there is nothing like this in the original because there Gawaine's effort is conscious and deliberate. But Winters (in a characteristically American way) goes directly to the heart of the whole matter: Gawaine is never really "insecure" --unless about dying, and this is his single flaw-- because he is steeped in civilization.

The Green Knight's revenge, presented in the last two stanzas, is thus not really the climax of the poem, but its fit conclusion (this is not apparent in the original, since that poem depends to a degree on surprise and Gawaine's naivité, until the third stroke of the axe). The poet has not disdained intense experience, yet has been firm in his character: he is not destroyed ("The knight withheld his giant

thrust"), but is allowed to return to full consciousness with what he knows: with mind intact, a lesson learned, a new boundary defined. In the final stanza, the symbolic connection of nature with pure experience is reaffirmed in the details of the first two lines. The poet makes his way back to the human world, that is, to the sense men have traditionally made of the amoral, unabstracted world of nature, to rest on a "drying hill." After submersion: repose, lucidity, and distance --and the possibility of drying not only out, but up. The entire stanza seems to me a fine example of post-Symbolist economy and power.

"The Slow Pacific Swell" is almost entirely real-life description. The first section describes a seascape remembered from childhood, the second a much closer encounter with the sea --presumably as a young man, and the third the sea as it exists for the speaker in the present. The three accounts are significantly different in tone, yet the poem is remarkably of a piece. The flexibility is in part facilitated by the chronological structure and by the metrical norm, but it is characteristic of post-Symbolist verse. The poem's detail, extremely sharp in itself, carries a meaning beyond the purely descriptive because the sea functions here (to quote one of several accounts of the sea in Winters' criticism) as "a traditional symbol of the changing universe . . . and in addition a symbol of those elements in human nature which elude understanding and control."[20] The symbolism is generated by the presence of a few phrases that have at once descriptive and conceptual value. The poem more closely approximates the post-Symbolist ideal of a "continuous texture" than any of the poems I have discussed.

The description in the poem's first stanza is extremely fine, yet it is appropriately quiet and remote, an effect made possible by the metrical firmness. The meter is flexible enough, however, to allow the details of the vision to develop, just as appropriately, by association: the sea, the rain, the flattened flowers (an image that anticipates the action of stanza two), the wind (that also flattens flowers), the sound of the water, the boats on the sea, their apparent stillness. The crucial thematic elments are "forever," "bounding the earth," "pale tranquility," "firm in direction," and "the artificer/ Of quiet, distance."

In stanza two the speaker remembers a time when the sea was not held steady, when he came much closer to pure experience than a child --and this is the sense in which the distance of stanza one works to dispell a Romantic myth about children and nature-- could come: <u>that</u> was the ocean. The remoteness disappears; the stanza is one of the most intensely active passages of iambic couplets that I know. This is partly because of the presence in every line of at least one verb or modifier of verbal origin ("washing," "retreating," "dreaming"), often particulary sensory: "Hove," "crush," "dragged." But at least as much credit is due the movement of the lines themselves, significantly more unsettled in syntax and especially caesural strength and position (three of the first four lines have definite secondary caesuras; the pause in many of the other lines falls within the foot) than stanzas one and three; and yet more forceful, by virtue of adjacent strong stresses: "sea/Hove," "dragged flesh," "I lay bare," "half drenched," "long sweep of the jaw," "the blunt head plunging." The metrical enactment of lines seven and eight is remarkable. But the poem's vividness does not break

free of thematic significance, and the words responsible are "tangle," "the skull [that is, not the mind] felt," and "dreaming hair," which give us the rational mind in abeyance; "Half drenched in dissolution" (the abstraction made astonishingly concrete"); erect"; and "knew myself the same." The very Melvillian whale is brilliantly symbolic of nature the powerful, primitive, and mysteriously other. The final glimpse of the whale as it plunges clear, for an instant, of the sea, is a potent analogue for the speaker's glimpse of pure experience.

The "sandy mound" and "wrinkled" sea in the poem's final stanza underline my initial suggestion that "The Slow Pacific Swell" deals with the same sort of experience as does "Sir Gawaine." The final stanza takes up the problem of the relation, in ordinary experience, of life in the road that men have made (the land) to "the green bark and the shade" (the sea), a problem only hinted at at the end of "Sir Gawaine." The opening details of description are by now readily analyzable in conceptual terms: "but a sound" suggests abstraction and language, roughly "just a word." "Sandy mound" gives us dryness and distance (height); "sleep" and "numb" give us the everyday insensitivity that makes sanity possible and that living "long inland" ("trained in principle, in abstraction") is a part of, but by which one may "perish of imperception" if one does not at least live near the sea. On the descriptive level, "limber margin" refers to the tides and perhaps to the more momentary unevennesses of the shoreline; on the conceptual level it refers to the fluctuant limits of understanding, beyond which the power of moral definition and proper response is lost, and experience becomes increasingly pure. The concluding three couplets of description are charged with emotion made complex by the attitudes

preceding. The lines are as full of active verbs as stanza two, but the perspective is the more distant one of "near" the sea. The net effect is suggestive of immense latent force ("commingling power," "whole Pacific [a muted pun] hovers," "stirs," "Heaving," "gathers"): vital, but primitive, undirected, and inscrutable ("chaos" and the rhythmically right "Heaving and wrinkled in the moon, and blind"). The final rhyme, despite the explicit intention of the last line, is ominous. And as description, the passage could not be improved upon.

Winters has written poems finer than "Sir Gawaine" and even than "The Slow Pacific Swell," and he has written on a wide range of themes, including political and historical themes, often using post-Symbolist methods. My point in discussing these two poems and the others I have discussed in this essay has been that romantic concerns are the ones that made the methods possible and necessary, and that the methods, in turn, have made for a sophistication of the concerns. Winters' poems are more impressive than those of Vaughan, Leconte de Lisle, and Keats in ways that the notion of post-Symbolist imagery helps us to see.

Notes

CHAPTER I

1 "The Extension and Reintegration of the Human Spirit: Through the Poetry Mainly French and American Since Poe and Baudelaire," in Uncollected Essays and Reviews, ed. Francis Murphy (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1973) --hereafter UDR-- p. 245.

2 "Poetic Styles Old and New," in Four Poets on Poetry, ed. Donald Cameron Allen (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), pp. 44-75.

3 "The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery," (1949) in The Verbal Icon (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1953), p. 116.

4 "Symbol and Metaphor," (1950) in The Verbal Icon, p. 24.

5 See Ray Frazer's concise history of this notion as it bears on literary practice, "The Origin of the Term 'Image'," ELH, 27 (1960), 149-161.

6 Axel's Castle (New York: Scribner's, 1931), pp. 76-7.

7 He does not in his mature work, at least. At twenty-four he published "The Testament of a Stone: Being Notes on the Mechanics of the Poetic Image" (1924), in which he attempts to "incite the beginnings of a scientific criticism of poetry" by trying to systematize the kinds of relations ("fusions") of sensory detail, metaphor, thought, and rhythm possible in poetry. It is a modernist work, indebted to both Pound and Eliot; Winters later came, as an Aristotilean Thomist, to regard the essay as "practically worthless."

8 The thesis, for instance, of Rosemond Tuve's Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1947) is that the modern notion of what an image can do ("the accurate transliteration of a sense impression") is much narrower than that of Renaissance poets and rhetoricians: "the [Renaissance] didactic theory operates to lessen the emphasis upon the sensuous function of images and to subtilize and multiply the logical functions they are capable of performing" (p. 409). Allen Tate writes: "In metaphysical poetry the logical order is explicit . . . the imagery by which it is sensuously embodied must at least have the look of logical determinism," On the Limits of Poetry (New York: Swallow Press, 1948), p. 80; my italics. Cleanth Brooks writes: "most clearly of all the metaphysical poets reveal the essentially functional character of metaphor. We cannot remove the comparisons from their poems as we might remove ornaments and illustrations attached to a statement," Modern Poetry and the Tradition (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1948), p. 331. Odette De Mourgues finds Maurice Scève's poetry to be characterized by "functional rather than merely decorative conceits;" he "uses imagery sparingly . . . when it is the only possible

way to convey his thought," Metaphysical, Baroque, and Précieux Poetry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), pp. 29, 21; my italics.

9 "Logic and Lyric" (1953), in The Collected Essays of J. V. Cunningham (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1976), p. 167. Winters, unfortunately, is not as careful in his use of the term as he might be: Donne's "Stay, O sweet, and do not rise!/ The light that shines comes from thy eyes" is an image (Forms, 93); and "the imagery [of Tuckerman's "The Cricket"] is magnificent in its own right: "Might I but find thy knowledge in thy song!/ That twittering tongue, Ancient as light, returning like the years" (Forms, 262).

10 Although it is convenient to think of imagery as a subset of sensory detail, and although some criterion of accuracy is assumed in speaking of images as "precise," it does not follow, of course, that the most striking image will be the one offering the most correct technical description or compiling the most detail. Biology textbooks are often accurate in these ways, and mainly barren of imagery. Vitality of detail depends to a very large extent on compression and intensity of context. Such characteristically poetic elements as assonance, alliteration, and rhythm can do much to bring a passage without any great weight of sensory nouns and adjectives to life, especially where the subject involves movement, as in Shelley's skylark:

> The blue deep thou wingest
> And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

Or Ralegh:

> Seeing my flesh must die so soon,
> And want a head to dine next noon,
> Just on the stroke when my veins start and spread,
> Set on my soul an everlasting head.

11 In English Renaissance Poetry: A Collection of Shorter Poems From Skelton to Jonson, ed. John Williams (New York: Anchor Books, 1963), p. 238.

12 It is often difficult to get at Kermode's real intention, since he is writing literary history and mainly paraphrasing others, but he often seems to mean by "Image" a sort of Bergsonian intuition of correspondence, answering to some deep truth about the universe. "The Image, for all its concretion, precision, and oneness, is desparately difficult to communicate and has . . . much to do with the alienation of the seer" (p. 5). We hear of Yeats' needing to recover "those images of truth which have nothing to do with the intellect of scientists, nothing to do with time. They exist beyond the possibility of dissociation . . . in a condition of perfect unity and vitality" (p. 102). (The capitalization of "image" is erratic throughout.)

13 The Collected Poems and Epigrams of J. V. Cunningham (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1971), p. 105. All further quotations are from this edition.

[14] Edward Taylor, Poems, ed. Donald E. Stanford (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), p. 287.

[15] I do not refer here to structure, the principle of following that pertains between details, although it is a closely related matter. The types of connection and progression between details Winters defined early in his career as the "logical," "scattered," "psychological," "narrative," and "double mood" structures (Review of Mina Loy, 1936; "The Extension and Reintegration of the Human Spirit," 1929), later substituting "method of repetition" for "scattered" and "pseudo-reference" and "qualitative progression" for "psychological," and adding "alternation of method" ("The Experimental School in American Poetry," 1938). Finally, Winters came to think of structures as simply either rational or associative.

[16] William Carlos Williams, Collected Earlier Poems (New York: New Directions, 1951), p. 340. All further quotations are from this edition.

[17] Collected Poems (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1978), p. 32. All further quotations are from this edition.

[18] Collected Poems 1909-1962 (London: Faber, 1963), p. 23. All further quotations are from this edition.

[19] Often, where no clear motive is present, at the expense of descriptive sharpness. In his unpublished dissertaion, "The Rhetoric of Artifice" (Stanford, 1967), Kenneth Fields finds the two dominant attitudes to poetry in nineteenth century France (called by Pound "The Hard and the Soft") to be limited because mutually exclusive in this way (pp. 1-38).

[20] Poems, ed. Emrys Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 2.

[21] Oeuvres complètes, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1975), I, p. 72.

[22] "One cannot believe," Winters writes, "that Wordsworth's passions were charmed away by a look at the daffodils, or that Shelley's were aroused by the leaves blown about in the autumn wind. A motive is offered and the poet wants us to accept it, but we recognize it as inadequate"("Preliminary Problems," The Anatomy of Nonsense, in In Defense of Reason (Denver: Swallow Press, 1947) —hereafter IDR, p. 36. The notion that the appropriateness of emotional response to motive is a moral relation, the central notion of Winters' criticism, is at least as old as Aristotle's Ethics (see especially Book II).

[23] Oeuvres poétiques, ed. Jacques Robichez (Paris: Garnier, 1969), p. 120. All further quotations are from this edition.

[24] It should be noted in passing that Winters uses "associational" to refer both to structure and, as here, to a use of imagery. Post-Symbolist imagery is not associational in this way, but the post-Symbolist method may involve associational structure.

25 Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire, ed. Louis Moland (1877; rpt. Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1967), pp. 83-85.

26 Frederick Goddard Tuckerman, Complete Poems, ed. N. Scott Momaday (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p. 7.

27 Collected Poems (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1967), p. 59.

28 Comparison or analogy of a certain sort may well be the basis for most figurative language, but I think W. K. Wimsatt is right to call for a distinction "between metaphor (or simile) and certain less imaginative similitudes which are likely to be called analogies or merely comparisons. A certain traitor is like Judas, a certain tyrant is like Caesar. The two sides of an analogy belong in the same specific class. But when a man is called a skunk, specific difference as well as similarity is involved, the predication is concrete, there is metaphor" ("The Substantive Level" [1951], in The Verbal Icon, pp. 149-150).

CHAPTER II

1 "Being, Poetry, and Yvor Winters' Criticism," Denver Quarterly, 10 (1975), 55-66.

2 Locke writes late in the seventeenth century that "our observations employed either about sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understanding with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge from whence all the ideas we have, or naturally can have, do spring" (An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, II, 1, ii). After Hobbes and Locke the central philosophical subjects became nature and the senses as the source of mind, and the subjectivity of perception and morals. Related themes of pantheism and material determinism, on one hand, and the creating Imagination and, eventually, the prison of subjectivity, on the other, seeped into literature.

3 I will discuss neither the history of the movement nor its ideas in any detail. A fairly detailed history is Kenneth Cornell's The Symbolist Movement (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1951). A concise account of the ideas is the first chapter of Daniel O'Connell's book The Opposition Critics: The Antisymbolist Reaction in the Modern Period (The Hague: Mouton, 1974). O'Connell does not go so far as to judge the ideas, but his account is clear.

4 It is only fair to note that Winters is sometimes more careful in his use of the word: "the signs for concepts acquired connotation, historical, emotional, or whatever" (Forms, xiv).

5 Stéphane Mallarmé: Poems (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936), p. 298. An extensive account of the history of this notion in French

poetics is D. J. Mossop's Pure Poetry: Studies in French Poetic Theory and Practice 1746-1945 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

6 Paul Valéry, Oeuvres, ed. Jean Hytier (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1957), vol. 1, p. 1363, 1459. All further quotations are from this edition.

7 See Wittgenstein: "Dis Anschauung der Welt sub specie aeterni ist ihre Anschauung als --begrenztes-- Ganzes. Das Gefühl der Welt als begrenztes Ganzes ist das Mystische," Tractatus Logico-Philisophicus, 6:45.

8 Oeuvres complètes, ed. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1954), p. 385. All further quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from this edition.

9 "The Parnassians, for their part, take the thing just as it is and put it before us --and consequently they are deficient in mystery: they deprive the mind of the delicious joy of believing it is creating. To name an object is to do away with three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem, which is derived from the satisfaction of guessing little by little: to suggest it, to evoke it, that is what charms the imagination." Quoted by Edmund Wilson in Axel's Castle, p. 20.

10 Winters is preoccupied here, as elsewhere, with a more psychological notion of purity, namely "unclassified sensation (a purely hypothetical infinity, which, however, we can approach indefinitely)," IDR, p. 99. "Pure" experience is immediate, unabstracted, unjudged experience of any kind. Winters refers us to Allen Tate's essay "The Fallacy of Humanism" (1930; later published as "Humanism and Naturalism" in Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas [New York: Scribner's, 1936]); "Quality" and "Quantity" are roughly equivalent, in that essay, to pure experience and abstraction. Tate writes: "The source of Quality is nature itself because it is the source of experience . . . . Pure Quality would be pure evil, and it is only through the means of our recovery from a lasting immersion in it, it is only by maintaining the precarious balance upon the point of collapse into Quality, that any man survives his present hour: pure Quality is pure disintegration" (pp. 140-141).

11 "Crise de vers," Oeuvres complètes, pp. 365-6.

12 p. 368.

13 p. 368.

14 Bergson is compatible here, in his worry about the way language ("le mot brutal, qui emmagasine ce qu'il y a de stable, de commun, et par conséquent d'impersonnel") makes seem objective what is really uniquely personal and evanescent. Language is "le voile que nous interposions entre notre conscience et nous." "Cette influence de langage sur la sensation est plus profonde qu'on ne le pense généralement. Non seulement le langage nous fait croire à

l'invariabilité de nos sensations, mais il nous trompera parfois sur le caractère de la sensation éprouvée," Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience (Paris: Alcan, 1930), p. 99ff.

15 Letter to Henri Cazalis, Nov. 1864, Correspondance 1862-1871, ed. Henri Mondor (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 137.

16 See "Renouveau," for example. Mallarmé's curiously abstract and egocentrical attempts to treat street-life are also interesting in this connection. One might compare some of his "Chansons Bas," for instance "La Marchande d'habits"--

> Le vif oeil dont tu regardes
> Jusques à leur contenu
> Me sépare de mes hardes
> Et comme un dieu je vais nu--

with any of Swift's "Verses made for Women who cry Apples, etc.,":

> Be not sparing,
> Leave off swearing
> Buy my herring
> Fresh from Malahide
> Better ne'er was tried.
> Come eat 'em with pure fresh butter and mustard,
> Their bellies are soft, and as white as custard,
> Come, six-pence a dozen to get me some bread,
> Or, like my herrings, I soon shall be dead,

Selected Poems, ed. C. H. Sisson (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1977).

17 In "Hérodiade," for example, such details are used quite deliberately to emphasize the heroine's unnatural frigidity:

> Je veux que mes cheveux qui ne sont pas des fleurs
> À répandre l'oubli des humaines douleurs,
> Mais de l'or, à jamais vierge des aromates,
> Dans leurs éclairs cruels et dans leurs pâleurs mates,
> Observent la froideur stérile du métal,
> Vous ayant reflétés, joyaux du mur natal,
> Armes, vases depuis ma solitaire enfance.

One finds French poets at least as early as Baudelaire using frigid, metallic imagery deliberately in this way.

18 Of "Renouveau" Mallarmé wrote: "C'est un genre assez nouveau que cette poésie où les effets matériels, du sang, des nerfs, sont analysés et mêlés aux effets moraux, de l'esprit, de l'âme" (Correspondance 1862-1871, pp. 30-31). One should note here the aesthete's use of "effets," which betrays the true nature of Mallarmé's concern with the "matériels" and "moraux."

19 Correspondance 1862-1871, p. 116.

20 This passage from Sonnet #60 is not untypical of Shakespeare's style:

> Nativity once in the main of light,
> Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crowned,
> Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight.

The Sonnets, ed. William Burto (New York: Signet, 1964), p. 100.

21 "Autre Eventail, de Mademoiselle Mallarmé."

22 I do not by this mean to relieve him of partial blame for modern hermeticism, for the attitudes (and ubiquitous themes) of self-consciousness and effete despair about one's art, and for the doctrines of creative ambiguity and multiplicity (or "multivalency") of meaning. And most importantly, Mallarmé's sort of writing is the murky well-spring of the general critical attitude that has usurped the place of the traditional view of art as a moral criticism of life, namely the view of art as self-reflective or self-allusive, and concerned first with aesthetic and structural effects and only incidentally with meaning. By this view, the experience of a work of literature is primarily an aesthetic experience, a response to formal connections and patterns, which it is the critic's task (although apparently he may seek the assistance of a computer) to seek out and multiply past all human bounds. Anyone who has seen a Mallarméan exegete perform will recognize the connection immediately.

My point, however, is that those poems of Mallarmé's that can not be made out as periphrastic descriptions or allegories but seem to be simply rebellions against meaning (not revolutions, to use Sartre's distinction; poems like the famous series of three sonnets beginning "Tout Orgeuil fume-t-il du soir" depend for their effects on the persistence of the ordinary mental habits they would subvert) sometimes "mean," insofar as they do at all, in a way unimaginable before the Symbolists. For instance:

> À la nue accablante tu
> Basse de basalte et de laves
> À même les échos esclaves
> Par une trompe sans vertu
>
> Quel sépulcral naufrage (tu
> Le sais, écume, mais y baves)
> Suprême une entre les épaves
> Abolit le mât dévêtu
>
> Ou cela que furibond faute
> De quelque perdition haute
> Tout l'abîme vain éployé
>
> Dans le si blanc cheveu qui traîne
> Avarement aura noyé
> Le flanc enfant d'une sirène.

The procedure here, as usual, is to create the impression of symbolism, the impression that something definite is being described and that the something has significance beyond itself. The something here, obscured by oddities of syntax and figure, turns out to be a shipwreck, or rather a bit of foam (to which, the minimal punctuation indicates, the poem is addressed) that may be evidence of a recent sinking, but that may also be merely the hair of a young siren. The poem comes remarkably close to realizing the parodoxical Mallarméan ideal --the description of an absence. We have a feeling (of loss and puzzlement) detached from any motive. We also have an enactment of the intellectual idea "absence"; the entire poem "symbolizes" the idea in a wholly unparaphraseable way.

23 Rimbaud, for example, was haunted by the spectre of an Absolute concealed behind the barrier of sensible appearances, an "inconnu" that the poet-seer may be favoured with access to. Valéry inherited the whole complex of notions surrounding "la poésie pur": e.g. the view of poetry as detachable from life in the manner of a highly impersonal game, the view that there is an "émotion poétique," the view that poetry and abstract thought are antipathetic.

24 "Les Réparties de Nina," Oeuvres, ed. Suzanne Barnard (Paris: Garnier, 1960), pp. 66-67. All further quotations are from this edition.

25 This quest, it would seem, was motivated by extreme forms of two doctrines that have infected poets since the Romantices: the nominalist notion that the universe is made up entirely of particulars and the immediate sensations of individuals (apparently derived, in Rimbaud's case, from Helvétius), and the notion that poetry can give us not merely account of experience, but experience itself (a distortion of the legitimate notion that poetry is not a jeu de quilles, but actually a way of seeing: this emphasis finally separates Rimbaud from Mallarmé and Valéry).

26 Some of this has been described by D. J. Mossop in Pure Poetry, pp. 225-248.

27 "Xenophilometropolitania': The Reluctant Modernism of the Imagists," in Figures in a Ground: Canadian Essays on Modern Literature Collected in Honor of Sheila Watson, ed. D. Bessai and D. Jackel (Saskatoon: Prairie Books, 1978). The resemblance to the Parnassian-Symbolist question in France is obvious.

28 Chao Kuan-Hsio, in The Penguin Book of Chinese Verse, trans. Robert Kotewall and Norman L. Smith, ed. A. R. Davis (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962), p. 70. When they do not seem mysterious, the undeveloped descriptions of oriental verse are often simply sentimental in English. One should, of course, keep in mind that such poems may well have genuine mystical significance for oriental readers inward, in a way speakers of Western languages can probably never be, with the religious attitudes involved. This is clearly suggested by the moment of abstraction in this eighteenth century poem (a good example, I think, of "das Gefühl der Welt als begrenztes Ganzes") by Yeh Pao-Sung:

The chill snow is heaped against the sunlit window;
I burn my incense and rejoice to comprehend the way
of Buddha.
Out in the bamboos a bluecap calls,
And the breeze sways a snow-covered twig. (p. 70)

29 Collected Shorter Poems by Ezra Pound (London: Faber, 1952), p. 119. All further quotations are from this edition.

30 Imagist Poetry, ed. Peter Jones (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 90. All further Imagist quotations, Pound, Williams, and Winters excepted, are from this edition.

31 "Vorticism," Fortnightly Review, n.s., 96 (1914), p. 467.

32 "Impressionism: Some Speculations," Poetry, 2 (1913), p. 185.

33 "The Testament of a Stone," in UER, p. 199; Winters' italics. Note also such famous phrases as Eliot's "fusing new wholes"; Bergson's "many diverse images, borrowed from very different orders of things, may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is an intuition to be seized"; Pound's "the one image poem is a form of superposition, that is to say one idea set on top of another" or "the Image is more than an idea. It is a vortex or cluster of ideas" (Pound uses the word "idea" loosely); Fenollosa's "relations are more real and more important than the things they relate"; Hulme's "thought is prior to language and consists in the simultaneous presentation of two different images."

34 Collected Poems (London: Macmillan, 1919), p.465.

35 I use "form" in the broad sense defined by J. V. Cunningham: "that which remains the same when everything else changes." "The Problem of Form" (1963), in Collected Essays, p. 249.

CHAPTER III

1 The Function of Criticism, p. 70; my italics.

2 "The Extension and Reintegration of the Human Spirit" (1929), UER, p. 264; Winters' italics.

3 Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems, ed. George Parfitt (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 80. All further quotations are from this edition.

4 See Wimsatt's table of "three main styles arranged in a scale with reference to the concept of species and implicitly to that of substance":

1. The abstract or less than specific-substantive style: eg. "implement."

2. The minimum concrete or less than specific-substantive style: eg. "spade."
3. The extra-concrete, the detailed, or more than specific style: eg. "rusty garden spade." ("The Substantive Level," p. 138).

5 In an essay on Winters' poems, Howard Kaye makes this point in passing: "It is a method that develops in one direction out of ordinary descriptive poetry, and in the other out of ordinary figurative language which conveys abstractions." ("The Post-Symbolist Poetry of Yvor Winters," Southern Review, 7 [1971], 176-197.)

6 In The Function of Criticism: Problems and Exercises (Denver: Swallow Press, 1957), p. 69.

7 Opus Posthumous (New York: Knopf, 1959), p. 96.

8 In The Compass, no. 3 (April, 1978), p. 61.

9 Collected Poems (New York: Knopf, 1954), p. 97. All further quotations are from this edition.

10 The soul, of course, is virtually impossible to describe without recourse to figurative language, but Verlaine's figure in "Claire de Lune," as it expands, drifts away, in typical Symbolist fashion, from defineable conceptual connection altogether:

Votre âme est un paysage choisi
Qui vont charmants masques et bergamasques,
Jouant du luth et dansant et quasi
Tristes sous leurs deguisement fantasques.

Tout en chantant sur le mode mineur
L'amour vainqueur et la vie opportune,
Ils n'ont pas l'air de croire à leur bonheur
Et leur chanson se mêle au clair de lune,

Au calme clair de lune triste et beau,
Qui fait rêver les oiseaux dans les arbres
Et sangloter d'extase les jets d'eau
Les grands jets d'eau sveltes parmi les marbres.

11 Stevens' own explanation of the poem as "an example of the necessity of identifying oneself with reality in order to understand and enjoy it," (Letters, ed. Holly Stevens [New York: Knopf, 1960], p. 464) is perhaps the least satisfying of the possibilities. It has the poem say roughly this: one should try to connect with nature in order not to be depressed by the hard fact that no real connection is possible. This interpretation not only makes the poem an act of bad faith, but fights the fact that the poem stresses the reality, not the deception. An alternative reading allowed by the syntax is: one must have a sterile mind indeed not to be moved by such stunning surroundings. But this reading does not adequately take hold of either the statement or the feeling of the last two stanzas, which clearly offer a harsh realization of nature's indifference.

CHAPTER IV

1 Opus Posthumous (New York: Knopf, 1959), p. 164.

2 Works, ed. L. C. Martin, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 537.

3 Timber: or Discoveries, in Complete Poems, p. 399.

4 William Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey," Poetical Works, ed. E. de Selincourt, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), II, p. 259.

5 Complete Poems, ed. John Barnard, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 346.

6 Selected Letters, ed. Lionel Trilling (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951), p. 92. Shelley's notion of morality in his Defence of Poetry is based on a similar sort of imaginative Einfühlung. Keats' "Negative Capability," however, is more aesthetic than ethical: "with a great poet, the sense of beauty overcomes every consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration."

7 Revaluation (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936), pp. 245-6.

8 Fred Inglis, Keats (London: Evans, 1966), p. 166.

9 Arthur Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature (London: Dutton, 1899), p. 3.

10 Poèmes antiques (Paris: Lemerre, n.d.), p. 292.

11 One of Keats' tricks is to make his description refer not to a particular thing or scene perceived, but to a general and remote one of his imagining. We do not get the speaker's immediate prospect, but the impression of many and distant "glooms" and "ways"; the bird sings in "some melodious plot"; the roses are "the haunt of flies on summer eves," not here and now. So we get vagueness, but the impression of local concreteness, as in Mallarmé.

12 French, it would seem, is less promiscuous in its origins than English and so lacks the wealth of synonyms; it is mainly unaccentual, and so lacks some of the suggestive possibilities of rhythm; and it had no William Shakespeare (significantly, the French poets who most closely approach Shakespearian suggestiveness and insistent, convoluted figurativeness --but not concreteness-- are the would-be disrupters of the French tradition, the Symbolists). It is not surprising that a writer of obscurantist tendencies like Conrad preferred English to French.

13 "The Testament of a Stone," in UER, pp. 194-5, 198.

14 In an essay on Winters' Greek allegories, Grosvenor Powell describes the problem that is "the prime concern of the romantic poet": "The relationship between subject and object . . . is only a polarity when considered schematically and statically. In experience, the two poles fuse inextricably --the intensity of the experience determining the degree of fusion. In the most intense moments of vision, the polarity disappears. These facts raise a problem: in order to live and to be conscious, one must --in some sense-- fuse with and become what one perceives and experiences. Such fusion is, insofar as it is more or less complete, the loss of consciousness," Southern Review, 14 (1978), p. 264. As I understand it, however, the experience Powell seems to be describing actually entails the disappearance of the distinction between loss of consciousness and solipsism. In an early poem of Winters' that contemplates immersion in sensation, "Alone," we find the lines:

> I who never speaks,
> Listened days in summer trees,
> * * * *
> Mine own eyes did not exist!
> When I struck I never missed.

15 See the "Introduction" to Forms, xiv-xx, on the Western tradition, for instance, and the Dickinson essay in Maule's Curse on nature: "to approach nature is to depart from the fullness of human life, and to join nature is to leave human life" (IDR, p. 292).

16 In a review of the Collected Poems (Twentieth Century Literature, 9 [1963], 127-139), Alan Stephens, quoting Kenneth Burke, offers this in connection with Winters' persistent concerns: "once a man has perfected a technique of complaint, he is more at home with the sorrow than he would be without it. He has developed an equipment, and the integrity of his character is best upheld by situations that enable him to use it." This is doubtless in some measure true of Winters, but one should note that the subject of his complaint is the very problem of the relationship of a man's "equipment" to experience.

17 The passage from "Notes" is quoted by Kenneth Fields in "The Rhetoric of Artifice," p. 250; the passage from Primitivism and Decadence is in IDR, p. 99.

18 "Herman Melville, and the Problems of Moral Navigation," in Maule's Curse, IDR, p. 202, 204.

19 "The Extension and Reintegration of the Human Spirit," UER, p. 264.

20 Forms, p. 251. Winters' application of this notion to Melville in Maule's Curse is excellent, but the notion leads him, I think, to overestimate Dickinson's poem beginning "I started early, took my dog," and Tuckerman's "The Cricket."

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